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Evolution of and social trends in the twentieth century Spanish American short story with illustrations in translation

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THE EVOLUTION OF AND SOCIAL TRENDS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY SPANISH AMERICAN SHORT STORY

with illustrations in translation

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EVOLUTION OF THE SPANISH AMERICAN SHORT STORY

It was during the sixteenth century, that golden age of exploration and discovery, that the Spanish conquistadores found their way across the seas to plant the flag of their mother country in the virgin territory of the New World. These lands they dedicated to the Spanish crown. The primary reasons for their coming are well-known. Lust for adventure and desire for untold wealth and treasure in the New World provided the necessary impetus. Wherever colonization took place, the cross, symbol of Christianity, was erected, and religious orders took over the task of proselytizing the Indians.

In considering Spanish American literature it is important to bear in mind these facts. There is no typical Spanish American country, nor is there a typical Spanish American literature. The topography of the individual countries with their resultant climates and industries, the racial characteristics of the indigenous populations, and the degree of civilization to which these aborigines had advanced at the time of the Spanish conquest greatly cast their influence upon the character of the people and the literature to be produced.

During the colonial period because the viceroys were, for the most part, patrons of the arts, literary endeavor was encouraged. Writing in this period accomplished one purpose

if no other: that of giving to the world a detailed account of the settlement of Spanish America. A great volume of poetry was sent back to the mother country mainly by poet soldiers. It was ill-regarded there, because it did not conform to the acceptable standards of the time.

Of chroniclers there was a great number. Foremost among them was Bernál Díaz de Castillo, who wrote glowing and personalized reports of Mexico's conquest in his "La Verdadera Historia de la Conquista de Nueva España." Another effective chronicler of the times was Bartólome de las Casas, who pleaded the cause of the innocent Indian at the hands of the ruthless conquistador in his "Historia de las Indias." Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, whose distinction it was to be the first writer of mixed blood on the new continent, contributed historical narratives deeply colored with legend and written in vigorous and enthusiastic style. Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, in true epic proportion, told in verse the story of the bloody subjugation of Chile in his immortal "Araucana."

By all odds the greatest literary figure of the seventeenth century in the Spanish colonies was Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, known in her native Mexico as "The Tenth Muse." Although she wrote in many mediums of literary expression, it is for her lyrical poetry that she is placed among the great.

Coester states that during this period "The forms (of literature) were crude and uncouth because literary models within reach of the writers were few."[1] Educational standards during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in both Spain and Spanish America were low. The Spanish crown held it inadvisable to educate the masses believing (and rightly so) that learning would but foster discontent. The Spanish crown and the Catholic church were synonymous terms in New Spain. The church held rigid dominion over the colonies until the present century. It is a well-known fact that the church actively forbade compulsory education. It has been only since the separation of church and state in Spanish America that illiteracy has decreased and the individual has been given educational opportunity. Only members of the privileged classes were allowed entrance to church schools, and there were no state schools for people of the lower classes to attend.

No nationalistic tendencies are to be noted in the writings of this period, for colonial thought and patterns of writing still bore the stamp of the mother country.

The dawn of the nineteenth century found the colonies ripe for revolution and eager to throw off the shackles of

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[1]Alfred Coester, The Literary History of Spanish America, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919), p. 39.

Spain, who was still holding them in oppression and abeyance. Revolutionary ideas were filtering in from the Old World. Torres-Ríoseco says that "the intellectual activity of this revolutionary period fed upon French ideas."[1] The lives of Bolívar, Belgrano, and other exponents of liberty were greatly influenced by the political upheaval abroad. Literature of this period in all countries was tinctured by the revolutionary aspirations and the strong feelings in the hearts of men. This new spirit modified the thinking of the period. Romanticism, a new literary medium of expression, sprang into being. Torres-Ríoseco comments that "It (romanticism) was the first step toward the discovery of native artistic genius."[2]

In all parts of the Spanish America revolutionary victories led to the writing of patriotic verse. Olmedo's Victoria de Junín, written in 1825, was one of the most outstanding. Five years before this a Cuban youth, Heredia, wrote the first romantic poem in the Spanish language: The Temple-Pyramid of Cholula. The tropical beauty of the Venezuelan jungles gave inspiration for Andres Bello's Silvas Americanas. The luxuriant nature of Argentina, coupled with

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[1]Arturo Torres-Ríoseco, Epic of Latin American Literature, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 45.

[2]Ibid., p. 84.

the injustices of the Rosas regime, furnished a fertile field of expression for other romantic writers. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in his Civilization and Barbarism: The Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga pleads for the end of tyranny. José Marmol, who won the title of "poetic hangman of Rosas," produced the first Argentinian novel Amalia. In 1867 María, the maestra obra of the romantic school, was formed by the pen of Jorge Isaacs of Columbia. This novel, nostalgic, sentimental, idyllic in the extreme, is perhaps the most widely read of any which South America has produced.

Until the last third of the nineteenth century only a small amount of information about the colonial peoples was revealed through the principal literary mediums of poetry, political history, and chronicles. Local color in these showed up to some small degree. The peoples of the New World had not expressed themselves in the novel, the drama, and the short story up to this point. Frederico de Onís believes that "the lack of success which Spanish America had experienced with these literary forms was but a symptom of its youth, whereas success in dealing with these same literary forms had come to the Europeans only after centuries of literary effort."[1] This observation seems logical inasmuch as

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[1]L. A. Wilkins, Antología de Cuentos Americanos, (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1924), Introduction by Frederico de Onís, p. ix.

these mediums have flourished in Spanish America only after the awakening of national consciousness.

The first literary movement to develop in the New World, which subsequently found its way to the Old, was that of modernism. The publication of the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío's Azul in 1888 marked its beginning. To the pen of that man may be attributed the dynamic force it acquired for a time. This new literary expression sought to avoid reality and to escape into the shadowy realms of the half-real, the melancholy, the symbolic, and the fanciful. Great attention was attached to form and imagery. Poets knelt at the shrines of beauty and music.

Hespelt gives the essence of modernism by saying "In brief, modernism repeated for Spanish America of the late nineteenth century what Gongorism had done for Spain of the Golden Age."[1] It admittedly served a purpose in doing away with sentimentality in lyrical poetry. Modernism added to the enrichment of the written word but at the same time it lacked linguistic reality. Writings were often verbose. The fact that the vernacular was shunned was a contributing factor in its downfall. Even the most faithful followers fell by the way realizing that "art for art's sake" was not

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[1]E. Herman Hespelt, An Outline of Spanish American Literature, (New York: F. S. Crofts and Company, 1941), p. 45.

enough to justify itself. Rubén Darío had accomplished perfection of style in this medium. Rodó of Uruaguay with his essay "Ariel" did Spanish America a service in first pleading the cause of Americanism and better understanding between Spanish America and the United States.

Modernism, while short-lived, cast its influence upon subsequent writing, certainly in poetry and to a lesser degree in prose. Emphasis on artistic style which shows up to a marked degree in the Spanish American short story can be traced back to this movement. It served as an opening wedge for a literature of a more realistic character. Spanish American writers had made their first authentic contribution to the world of letters and in so doing had gained for themselves a measure of literary self-confidence theretofore unfelt. They had learned that it was not necessary to pattern their literary creations after those of France and Spain. No longer feeling impelled to seek guidance for style, thought, form, and even theme across the Atlantic, writing lost its superficial quality and gained more lasting and worthwhile ones. Unless writing reflects an individual's or a nation's experience and interests, it can have little hope of permanent survival. Rioseco comments very aptly that "Until yesterday our literature was a type of appendix to Spanish literature."[1]

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[1]Torres-Rioseco, op. cit., p. v.

Having thrown off the yoke of foreign political and literary influence, national consciousness was being born. People began to focus their attention on problems of current interest. They began to write of the things close to their hearts, of their fight against adverse circumstances and conditions, of their struggle for existence. With the awakening of national pride they began to write of their own achievements, of their customs, of their landscapes. They had something now of which they could justly be proud: a country, a voice in its destiny.

The individual became important. His aspirations and hopes had been unexpressed and dormant. He wanted to tell of them. When he realized his own potential worth and when he felt for the first time that the future held hope and promise for him and his posterity, his creative genius was kindled. It found expression in the mediums of art, music, and literature. The introduction of indigenous forms called americanismos, led to the enrichment of the Spanish language.

People, who for so many centuries had remained silent, now opened their lips to tell their stories like babes uttering their first words. No longer did class distinction seal their lips. Had their political leaders and liberators not sprung from the lower classes too? They were now free to express themselves as they never had been before. Because life was rugged and fraught with difficulties, their writing

took a realistic turn.

Never before had two races so inherently different merged, nor on such a large scale. The mestizo is a combination of the artistic, melancholy, and passive disposition of the Indian and the poetic dash and mental alertness of the Spaniard. José Vasconcelos keenly observed that the fusion of the Spanish and Indian cultures in the mestizo produced "a race with a great vivacity of mind; quickness of understanding and at the same time, an unsteady temperament."[1] It was the mestizo who felt the new-born responsibility of leading the lower classes out of the ruts of superstition and ignorance. It was he who found an exhaust valve by expressing himself in art, music, and creative writing. In Spanish American writing one senses what Gertrude Walsh calls "the kaleidoscopic effect of the impact of civilizing and barbaric forces heightened in the fluid, fermenting society of Spanish America which still presents an arresting picture of a people in transition."[2]

Criollismo, a type of regional literature high in local color dealing with native themes and written in a language enriched by americanismos, gained a firm foothold.

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[1]José Vasconcelos y Manuel Jamio, Aspects of Mexican Civilization, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), p. 92.

[2]Gertrude W. Walsh, Cuentos Criollos, (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1941), p. xiv.

If the short story as a literary genre existed in Spanish America before 1839, record of it has been lost. It was often difficult to distinguish from the sketch. This fact, to some extent, still remains true.

To the Mexican, J. J. Pesado (1806-1861) goes the distinction of writing the first short stories published in Spanish America. "Los Aztecas," a group of fictionalized, historical episodes, appeared in 1839.[1] Other early exponents of this literary form were Ignacio Galván (1816-1843), General Riva Palacio (1832-1896), Rafael Delgado (1853-1914), and José Portillo (1850-1923). Most of the early narratives contributed by these men were centered around historical themes and were high in local color.

Social revolution was responsible for the impetus the short story acquired in Mexico; it was a medium which lent itself well to the expose of social injustices. Much of this new literature was but an outward expression of rebellion against existing social, economic, and educational inequalities. Revolutionary turmoil, strife, and consequent social unrest in the early twentieth century made the Mexican *mestizo* pick up his pen. Mexican writers of the short story place stronger emphasis on writings of sociological nature

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[1]Willis Jones and Miriam Hansen, *Spanish American Readings*, (Chicago: Henry Holt and Company, 1941), p. 8.

than do those of other Spanish American countries although this trend shows up in varying degrees of intensity in other countries as well. Rafael Muñoz (1902-) in his stories effectively portrays the futility of revolution.

At the present time Francisco Monterde (1896-), Dr. Atl (1875-), Ermilio Abreu Gómez (1895-), Jorge Ferretis (1902-), and Gregorio López y Fuentes (1895-) stand out in the field of the short story.

In Argentina and Uruguay the short story's unfolding was a natural process and its development, clearly defined. Its beginnings dated back many years and were crude and primitive. During the great part of the nineteenth century there was a popular, episodic literature improvised by the payadores, minstrels of the pampas, sung to the accompaniment of the guitar. A great part of this episodic literature was nothing more than the forerunner of gauchesque literature and the short story.

Estaban Echeverría's "Matadero", (Slaughterhouse) denouncing the tyranny of the Rosas regime, was Argentina's first short story. Though it was written in 1840, it was not until 1871 that it was published.[1] It was one of the first literary works of Spanish America free of foreign influence. The mechanization of industry with the resultant displacement

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[1]Gertrude Walsh, op. cit., pp. xvi-xvii.

of the gaucho in a new order of society in both Argentina and Uruguay has provided a fertile field for writers of the short story. Roberto Payró (1867-1928) in his stories draws the picture of the Argentine in its transitory stages from an agricultural to a mechanized civilization. José Alvárez (1848-1903) and Miguel Cané (1851-1905) have both, as costumbrista writers, contributed to its development in the Argentine.

Uruguay has produced the master of all Spanish American short story writers, Horacio Quiroga (1878-1937). His stories, generally, can be divided into two groups: those which depict abnormal psychological states and those which have animals as their protagonists. In his ability with the former he has often been compared with Poe, with the latter, Kipling. There is a universal appeal about his stories which will make them live on. Javier de Viana (1872-1926) also rates high among writers in Uruguay for his earnest and authentic portrayal of the gaucho in a decadent state.

The father of the Peruvian short story was Ricardo Palma (1833-1919). In his Tradiciones Peruanas (Peruvian Traditions) one finds the legendary and the historical beautifully and skillfully woven together in the writer's own inimitable manner. A number of contemporary Peruvian short story writers concern themselves with the Indian's reluctance to accept present laws and demands of modern society. Scath-

ing denouncements of political corruption show up in some of the Peruvian stories. One of the foremost writers of the short story in Peru today is Enrique López Albujar (1875-). Characters in "Cuentos Andinos" published in 1937 are the Peruvian Indians. Abelardo Gamarra (1857-) is primarily a journalist who, at the age of twenty-seven, owned his own publication, La Integridad. He has a well-developed faculty for describing the customs of his native land and injecting local color into his writings.

The originator of the Chilean short story was Jose Lastarria (1817-1888). In 1843 his first short story, "El Mendigo," was published. His writings dealt with social and political-historical themes. "Jotabeche" (J. J. Vallejo, 1809-1858) was another pioneer in this field of writing. He was a costumbrista and clearly described life of the early nineteenth century in Chile. Baldomero Lillo (1867-1923) initiated a new period in the history of the Chilean short story with his realistic descriptions of the hardships of the Chilean miners, peasants, and laborers of its water fronts. He was the first Chilean writer to direct his attention toward inequalities existing between various classes of Chilean society. His works have often been compared to those of famous Russian and Scandanavian writers. By some critics he is regarded as a genius, by others he has been criticized severely because of the fact that his stories lack local

color, have poor dialogue, and little movement.

Rafael Maluenda is another Chilean short story writer who has come into prominence with his tales of the underprivileged classes of the country. Manuel Rojas, although Argentinian by birth, has spent most of his life in Chile. His characterizations are vivid and his style arresting and forceful. In 1926 his "Hombres del Sur" was published.

At the present time there are many names which hold promise of literary productivity in the field of the short story: Marta Brunet, Olegario Baeza, who writes about military life; Mariano LaTorre, whose chief protagonist of his stories is the rural dweller; and Victor Silva, who writes with social significance about the nitrate region. Without a doubt, the short story has become the literary genre of Chile.

After Cuba obtained her independence from Spain in 1898, political and social reorganization resulted in increased literary activity, and the short story stepped into the foreground as it had in many other Spanish American countries. Foremost among Cuban short story writers is Alfonso Hernández Catá (1885-1940). Because of his ability to describe the inner workings of the mind, his stories have strong characterizations. Some of them because they have both local realism and universal appeal may be considered great. Others have a cosmopolitan touch about them due, no

doubt, to the fact that he spent much of his life out of his native Cuba.

Felipe Rodríguez (1889-) is another Cuban whose stories are likely to stand the test of time. He writes of the underprivileged classes and of their aspirations, struggles, and defeats.

The short story was late in developing in Venezuela. It was during the period from 1890 to 1900 that short stories first began to appear in the magazines, El Cojo Ilustrado and Cosmópolis.[1] It was coincident with the birth of Criollismo. The two outstanding writers of the Venezuelan short story are Rufino Blanco-Fombona (1874-) and Luis Urbaneja Achelpohl (1872-1937). Criollismo found ardent disciples in these two men. Blanco-Fombona is regarded as one of the outstanding literary personalities of Spanish America today. It must be admitted, however, that this distinction has been accorded him not because of his ability with the short story but because of his brilliance as a literary critic and as a novelist. His novels, Man of Iron and Man of Gold both have received wide acclaim. Many of his short stories carry a message of social importance.

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[1]Arturo Uslar Pietri y Julián Padrón, Antología del Cuento Moderno Venezolano, (Caracas: Escuela Técnica Industrial, Taller de Artes Gráficas, 1940), pp. 9-10.

Luis Urbaneja Achelpohl is not too well-known because, with the exception of three novels, relatively few of his works have been compiled into book form. Many of his short stories have been published only in magazines. He writes with great power and persuasion, and his characters stand out as living beings.

It has been only since the turn of the twentieth century that the short story has gained importance and has become established as a literary genre in Spanish America. In the beginning some space was allotted it in newspapers, but because of its brevity singly it could not be compiled in book form like the novel. Anthologies of their short stories did not appear before 1920 according to the best information this translator could obtain.

High illiteracy rates in Spanish America necessarily have minimized the number of potential writers. Because of the illiteracy and the ignorance of the masses, the reading public of Spanish America has been small; writing, from an economic point of view, has been an even less lucrative endeavor than in other countries of the world.

The popularity of the short story has coincided with the birth of a new era for our southern neighbors. It has proved especially powerful in stimulating and arousing interest in contemporary problems. Gertrude Walsh very aptly comments that this literary from "is suited to express a sense

of reality in a rapidly changing civilization."[1]

Three main themes reveal themselves in the Spanish American short story. They center around the rural dweller, the soldier, and members of the underprivileged classes. The majority of the stories are based upon the writer's first hand contact or experience with theme about which he writes. To convey a message they must be simple, heartfelt, and sincere; they must express the writer's own sense of reality.

As to subject matter, nothing is barred in Spanish America. No individual women figure in the stories. There are women in them, but no individual women, only types, such as the wise, virtuous mother, the prostitute, and the young maiden. Woman's status in Spanish American society is far subordinate to man's. She is still sheltered and protected in the home and by tradition and custom is still barred from many professions. In four countries she is still legally barred from entering certain professions.[2] The right of franchise has been withheld from women in nine Spanish American countries to date.[3]

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[1]Gertrude Walsh, op. cit., p. xv.

[2]Amalia de Castillo Ledón, Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres, (Washington, D.C.: Unión Panamericana, 1949), p. 31.

[3]Minerva Bernardino, Inter-American Commission of Women, Resumé 1946, (Washington, D.C., 1949), p. 6.

The world of the Spanish American short story is a masculine one. Man is pitted against himself, against nature, and against his environment. His inadequacy and helplessness in comprehending and contending with the society in which he lives with any degree of success runs as a thread through the stories. The reader witnesses his struggle against deeply ingrained superstitious attitudes. His passive acceptance of primitive conditions and his apathy and resignation to circumstance are the predominant notes in many of them. Man must prove himself in the primitive virtue of physical strength.

The characters' way of life is rugged and close to nature. They live without benefit of machinery, the radio, and the telephone. The modern comforts accepted by North Americans as necessary and vital are unknown to him.

The settings are rough, laid in taverns, in shanties, in mines and other places of work. The cult of violence strikes a dominant note. The Latin American is of fiery temperament. The motive of vengeance is powerful. The morose, the sanguine, the brutal, the dramatic, and the sensational predominate because these are a part of his life's experience.

In the main, the Spanish American wants his stories to reflect his life; he is a realist and to him life is a constant struggle. Consequently, to him a typical story is

a cross-section of life, not necessarily complete and by no means successful. Conflict between barbaric and civilizing forces is frequently noted.

Apt characterization and artistic style are two principal features. The vocabulary is rich and made even richer through the employment of americanismos. The Spanish American's emotional makeup demands a large vocabulary and facility of expression; this is true not only of the upper classes but also of the unlettered ones. We must judge language in the light of the Spanish temperament, not ours. It is difficult to find nuances of meaning in English for many Spanish expressions. Phrases which may sound maudlin to an English speaking person are not melodramatic but actually are natural and perfectly in keeping with the Spanish American temperament.

Plot is not too well-defined in many of the stories; it is sacrificed to the description of the happenings centered around an incident or event. The solemnity and peacefulness of nature in many of the stories show contrast and give emphasis to the turbulent state in the minds of the characters.

The translator does not wish to imply that all short stories coming out of Spanish America are concerned with the peasant, social injustice, rectification of the evils and defects of society, or military life. There are others, but, figuring in the minority, they lack the distinctive Spanish

American flavor and could have been written by people of any other country.

It is the stories which expose to the reader's eye the vibrant, fast-pulsating heart of Spanish America which will live. They are crude at times, misunderstood, underestimated. Some have been written from musty, yellow notes taken by one who jotted down day-by-day impressions during the bloody days of the Mexican Revolution, others as the result of an impression or series of impressions gleaned by an author during a walk through a poor section of an over-crowded city, or as the result of having worked in mines, nitrate fields and having actually experienced the injustices of present day society. One thing they all have in common: the realistic touch.

Perhaps the Latin American's patriotic zeal and desire to improve existing social conditions could be likened to ours in post-revolutionary times when our country was struggling for its foothold in the brotherhood of respected nations. At the awakening of our national consciousness feeling ran high in the minds of men that theirs was the God-given task of making something strong and permanent of this new land of promise.

William Cullen Bryant was our first translator of Spanish American writing, the poem being "To Niagara" by Jose'

María Heredia.[1]

During the nineteenth century there were a few other scattered translations, mainly in the field of poetry. It was not until 1916, however, that the first literary history of Spanish America appeared. It was Alfred Coester's The Literary History of Spanish America. So it was not until after that date that the North American acquired information about Latin America's literary achievements to any appreciable degree. It has only been in the last two decades that translation of Spanish American literature has been done to a degree offering to the English speaking person, who is not bilingual, the opportunity of becoming acquainted with our neighbors' literary endeavors "south of the border." This new interest which we have acquired in translation is an important step forward. To understand their literature means to better understand the people who write it and live in its pages. The culture of a group of nations is reflected in its literary expression.

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[1]Arturo Torres-Ríoseco, Antología de la Literatura Hispano-americana, (New York: F. S. Crofts and Company, 1939), p. vi.

THE TRANSLATOR'S PROBLEM

To a person unfamiliar with the study of foreign languages, translation might seem a simple task. He might ask what it could involve besides the mastery of vocabulary and grammatical forms. These are essential of course, but the real problem begins at this point. This translator recalls that Longfellow once made the observation that before a person tries to write in hiw own language, he should first try his hand at translation. Translation makes one aware of the nuances and shades of meaning of words and aware of the importance of the individual word and phrase. Through choice of words, an expression either may be made to be forceful, vibrant, emphatic or dull and colorless.

How does the translator go about his work? First, he must read the selection he is to translate thoughtfully bearing in mind the author's reason for having written it. He must endeavor to sense the moods and to understand the personalities of the different characters so that he can project himself into the situation in which they find themselves and think and feel with them.

A literal translation proves stilted. Though a translator cannot depart in thought from the original, it is often necessary for him to rearrange thoughts and sentence structure to obtain a smooth translation. The ultimate aim is to

give to the reader the impression that it has been written in the language to which it has been translated. The measure of technique the translator acquires determines his style and success in translation.

In dealing with the writings of so many different countries and individual authors as has been done in this thesis, the number of colloquialisms is necessarily large. Some of them are recognized by the average reader; others have been explained by footnotes; some almost defy reproduction in another tongue.

It is to be hoped that the translator has been able to retain the original essence of the many stories to some considerable degree, and that the reader will appreciate the fact that our southern neighbors are making noteworthy contributions in the field of the short story. How may we better learn to understand and appreciate our southern neighbors (without first-hand contact) than through the medium of their literature?

Washington Irving commented that "The Spanish language is full of power, magnificence, and melody. To my taste it excels the Italian in variety and expression. It has twice the quantity of words that the French has."[1] Due to the

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[1]Fred Lewis Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1923), p. 16.

greater versatility of expression in Spanish, English sometimes fails to give exactly the right shade of meaning, or what might have been expressed by a word in Spanish requires a phrase in English. The use of the superlative and the dramatic is commonplace. It must be remembered in reading translation that we are dealing with people of another temperament and lingual heritage.

TRANSLATIONS ILLUSTRATING AND PREFACES DESCRIBING SOCIAL TRENDS

PILLAGE

Luis Felipe Rodríguez

Dating back to the time of the Spanish conquest, there has been a problem of land distribution in the majority of the countries of Spanish America. The Spanish crown gave the colonists grants of land which were known as encomiendas in return for certain services rendered. Many of these big landed estates were held under control by absentee landlords.

People who tilled these lands, (in many countries, the Indians), were held in a state amounting to virtual vassalage. They were but a part of these huge estates, and the contribution of their hands to the working and upkeep of this land did not lead to their advancement and betterment. As cropsharers they made a bare living. They gave the owners a large percentage of the crops which really amounted to their paying rental. In many cases they labored under the impression that the lands belonged to them because they tilled it. They were ignorant of the fact that other conditions could exist between the worker and the landlord and powerless to change these conditions, had they known.

In Mexico under the Juárez Reform Laws of 1856 all church land was to be expropriated and redistributed. The church at this date was in possession of one-half the land of the country and held it tax-exempt. In actuality, it was not until the Constitution of 1917 was drafted that the Catholic church lost its power and was dispossessed of its

landholdings. Under the Díaz regime foreign capital was encouraged to enter, and much land passed into the hands of foreigners. Natural resources of the country were exploited by these foreigners. Two billion dollars had poured into Mexico by 1912 for the development of petroleum, power, railroads, and agriculture. One half of this amount was invested by United States citizens.[1] By 1910 ninety per cent of Mexico's rural Indian population were working as peons on large haciendas or were on the verge of starvation in barren mountainous regions.[2] The ejido, a communally-owned parcel of land given to the Indian in colonial times, had disappeared completely, and the huge haciendas had absorbed most of Mexico's native population. Revolution was the inevitable result.

The Constitution of 1917 promised to give property rights back to the people. This has been a tremendous and far from simple program to carry out. Attempts were immediately made to break up the large estates, but even as late as 1930 two per cent of the landowners held seventy-eight per cent of the land. Ninety-eight per cent of the land-

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[1]Samuel Flagg Remis, A Diplomatic History of the United States, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1936), p. 540.

[2]Ruth Stanton and Louise Lodge, Una Moneda de Oro, (New York: Harper and Brothers), pp. 41-42.

owners owned but sixteen per cent.[1] The Cardenas administration (1934-1940) had as one of its main objectives the actual attainment of the agricultural revolution. In theory only had the revolution accomplished anything up to this point. More haciendas were broken down, more hacendados were ousted, and twenty per cent of the population were put on small tracts of land.[2] Expropriation of the petroleum interests, held mainly by American and British companies, took place in 1938. This was another step in giving the land back to the people.

When Cuba attained her independence from Spain in 1898, foreign capital was encouraged to come in to buy up huge tracts of lands. The peons who had some concept of landownership held to the premise that the land belonged to them who had fought to legally acquire it. They were powerless to prove right of title because they had never held title to the lands they worked. Because of the lack of education they were unaware of legal complexities. The security of knowing the land was theirs to till and to live on had been all they had asked of life. As foreign interests lay hold of much of the land, the peons were forced to the outer

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[1] Mexico, Next Door Neighbor, Coordinator of American Affairs, pp. 6-7.

[2] Hubert Herring, Mexico, the making of a Nation, (New York: Foreign Policy Association, Inc., 1942), p. 54.

fringes. Industries have absorbed some of these displaced people. Others continue to live on the lands as peons and scarcely earn enough to keep body and soul together.

The land question in Mexico and Cuba is typical of that found in other agricultural countries of Latin America. Concentrated in the hands of the few, the land has never belonged to the people. The church, the Spanish absentee landlord, and the foreign capitalist have held the upper hand for centuries. Now that their power has been broken, it is hoped that the native population will, with education, be able to take care of this heritage which has long been denied them.

Luis Felipe Rodríquez, the author of "Pillage," was born in Manzanillo, Cuba in 1889. The fact that he has known hardship himself and that his family was of the class of people around which he patterns his short stories and novels undoubtedly explains the power which he wields with his pen. His social consciousness and interest show up in all of his writings. In 1937 he received the prize offered by the magazine, Cultura, for his novel Cienaga. It is a tale of the marshlands of Cuba.

"Pillage" was taken from the book Cuentos Criollos, edited by Gertrude Walsh.

PILLAGE

It was during the rainy season that the order came for the old peasant, Ramón Iznaga, to abandon his farm. All his people had been born on that farm from the time of his grandfather, Bartolome, who had taken part in the Narcisco López conspiracy, to his little grandson, Toñito, who was still not much more than a baby and the apple of the old man's eye.

Leave his farm! Yes, he had been told that, but he couldn't believe it. Only a few days before, his good friend, José Rafael, had mused that it was indeed strange that after the harsh experience of the war for independence the lot of the Cuban peasant should be going from bad to worse. Much loyal Cuban blood had been shed in the fight against the Spaniards to the end of making life easier. Why should the peasant now be faced with such a miserable existence? An ironical twist of fate that was!

To be sure, old age was creeping upon him, but nevertheless he still had enough strength to wield a machete. Now, a few yolk of oxen, a few sugar cane plants, and banana trees made earning one's daily bread a certainty. And here comes a man sent by the devil, yes, perhaps from the depth of hell itself to tell him, Ramón Iznaga, a veteran of two wars of independence, a man who had always been proud to pay his way by the strength of his two hands, to leave his land.

Why, the blood and sweat of his entire family for generations had gone into the preservation of this land. It was as simple as that. He was being treated as if he were a poor, driven, wild dog or a marauding rodent to be shooed away from a tree.

Paradoxically, he stood in the midst of a celestial beauty which only the first rains of summer bring. The Cuban earth, long parched, drank in the rain and the sunlight. A silhouette of an enormous, rustling Ceiba tree stood out against the landscape absorbing the deep enjoyment of this life-giving season. In the midst of nature's splendor Ramón Iznaga's ranch was sad like others of his countrymen, because the land was soon to fall into the hands of others. Enough ground for burial would not be left to him.

He didn't understand legal documents; he had never had dealings with shyster lawyers. The Spanish government from Christopher Columbus' time on had told his people that the farms belonged to them who tilled them. After independence was declared, the authorities in Havana had had the same idea, for had they not said: "Take good care of the land which belongs to the state and to you because you till it. This is how you must show your patriotism."

How well he had done with his trust. He knew his land, which God in His justness had given him to till, as he knew his own two hands. It was as familiar to him as his daily cup

of coffee or the bright rays of the summer sun. In every bend, on every hillside, and in every furrow he heard its generous, maternal heart beat in unison with his own and that of his race.

Wasn't his father buried on it? And his father before him? On it, too, had he not taken his marriage vows? There his children and his grandchildren had been born. They had carried the white coffin of his last daughter, María Josefa, who had died--only God knows why--over its fields on its way to the final resting place in the cemetery of La Bermeja. The poor girl! She had been so charming and so good. It was hard to understand the doings of evil spirits!

Suddenly the old man's eyes shone like live coals. A convulsive shudder ran through his strong body.

"What's wrong, grandpa?" the children asked in surprise. Even Jeque, the family dog, from sheer old age no longer able to stand up, pointed his tail and raised his muzzle as if he, too, were aware of approaching disaster.

"There they come. Don't you children hear the noise of the horses' feet? And the boys aren't here."

It wasn't much later that the new owner, with title in hand and accompanied by two rural police, arrived. Before Ramon's obstinacy, the new owner minced no words.

"Ramón Iznaga, don't be stubborn now. Get off the land; it doesn't belong to you. We have given you every

consideration. If you haven't left by this afternoon, I shall be obliged to have you thrown off."

"This land is mine. I have worked it as did my father and grandfather before me."

"You're wrong. It belongs to me. Don't think I am trying to swindle you. These papers prove that I have a right to it."

The new owner proceeded to read the imperious order which consisted of high-sounding legal terms ordering the old farmer and veteran of independence to leave. This order made him a stranger on the land to which he had given his strength and his youth.

All the suffering, thirst for justice, and the grief of his ancestors seemed to be embodied in the visage of that broken old man.

With the desperate impulse of one who is about to kill or die, Ramón Iznaga raised his frantic and trembling hands above his head. Then suddenly before the astonishment, the horror, and the unbelief of all those around him he fell forward upon HIS land. His life had ebbed out. The old defenseless dog, who, like his master, had no place to die, sent up a lugubrious howl to the sunny heavens above.

In the Christian cemetery of a nearby town there is a grave marked with a roughly hewn cross and an epitaph written

in a crude hand which says: "The peasant, Ramón Iznaga, has found rest in the soil he loved so much during his life. May God grant that he be left to rest peacefully in its bosom."

QUETZALCOATL

Gregorio López y Fuentes

For centuries the Mexican Indian has lived in a state of isolation. His philosophy has been the Oriental one of wanting to have no wants. Because of the lack of navigable rivers and because little has been known about animal husbandry, his has been a sedentary existence. He has eked out a miserable living for himself on the soil, using the same primitive hand-methods of farming which his ancestors employed four hundred years ago. Most of his dealings have been done by barter.

During the colonial period little was done by the Spaniard to educate him, the theory being that to keep him in a state of abject ignorance would mean to hold power over him. In the middle half of the nineteenth century during the Juárez regime an attempt was made to separate church and state, and to gain protection for the Indian.

The Catholic church had always dictated the educational policies of the nation. It was vehemently opposed to mass education and held rigidly to the tenet that only the few should be educated. During the time Juárez was in office government-sponsored education was not compulsory. Many children of the upper classes continued with their church schooling. This fact divided Mexican youth into two groups reared to hate each other because of the opposing ideologies of the schools which they attended. The Reform Laws soon fell into disuse after Juárez went out of office and what had been a

worthy attempt on his part to establish a more democratic educational system, in actuality, accomplished nothing. Illiteracy rates have been high not only in Mexico but also in other Spanish American countries. Even as late as 1950 fifty-six per cent of Mexico's population was still illiterate.

Only since the definite separation of church and state in this present century has education been extended to any but a favored few. No definite attempts were made to enlighten the Mexican Indian and to bring him the advantages of modern ways of earning a living and protecting him and his family against disease until 1934 during the presidency of Lazaro Cárdenas. In the Six Year Program which Cárdenas sponsored, governmental action was taken to bring the Indian educational uplift along formalized lines in teaching him the three R's.

According to the governmental census of 1921 sixty-one per cent of Mexico's population was Indian. The problem of educating these huge numbers of people in rural areas has been tremendous and one difficult of solution inasmuch as they have been adverse to change and innovations which would tend to lighten their labors and bring them an improved way of life. To break down their prejudice toward discarding primitive methods of work has been most trying. The Indians are too deeply ingrained with the habits and customs of

centuries to accept advice without resentment.

Crop rotation, diversification of farming, and methods of fertilization have been unknown to them. Erosion of land has resulted on a large scale and countless acres of land have become worthless because of their ignorance of adaptation of crops to particular land formations.

Cooperative enterprise has never been engaged in inasmuch as each farm has been an entity unto itself for centuries. The burro has been man's only means of transportation.

Their knowledge of sanitary measures has been nil; as a result, health conditions have been very bad, epidemic disease very common, and the infant mortality rate very high. Their science of medicine has been limited to witchcraft and the application of herbs. That disease is caused by germs and not by evil spirits is a fact they have not comprehended.

Projects have been undertaken to educate the youth of these rural areas by bringing them to the capital and teaching them modes of modern living so that they, in turn, can go back to their rural habitats after having learned civilized ways to teach their people to accept and profit by them. Results have not been good inasmuch as these young people, once they have learned of the benefits and privileges afforded by living in a mechanized society, are reluctant to return to their rural communities.

In 1934 the Agrarian Department was created. There

are sixteen agricultural schools under the Department of Education. The greatest stride Mexico had made in agricultural education was in the establishment of the National College of Agriculture at Chipingo, under the direction of the Secretary of Agriculture. After a three year course a student is ready to return to his farm or to become a teacher in some rural school. To receive a degree in Agricultural Engineering each student must work somewhere in rural Mexico in a special field for a year.[1]

Teachers who have been trained for this work have been eyed with suspicion by these very people whom they have been sent out to help and in many cases have met death at their hands. Many of the teachers have been unable to adjust themselves to the primitive conditions under which they must live in order to rectify and better these same conditions.

Teaching in these rural areas requires great versatility on the part of the individual teacher. To break down centuries of superstition and prejudice toward the white man is not easy. Teaching in rural Mexico offers one of the most promising of careers, especially for a bilingual person because more often than not the natives must be taught Spanish. It is certainly one which will contribute most greatly to the

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[1]Mabel Knight, "Farming Looks Up in Mexico," Christian Science Monitor, Magazine Section, January 19, 1945, p. 7.

country's advancement and progress. The education and the assimilation of the Indian in society is one of the foremost problems which confronts Mexico today.

Gregorio López y Fuentes, the author of "Quetzalcoatl" and one of the foremost writers of the Mexican short story, has also written very successfully in the medium of the novel about different phases of the Mexican Revolution. For one of his novels, The Indian, he received the National Prize for Literature in 1935.

In all his writings one senses his deep concern over and his sympathy for the Mexican Indian. His keen insight into the character of the Indian undoubtedly stems from the fact that much of his early life was spent in rural Mexico. He writes from first hand observation.

"Quetzalcoatl" is from the book, Una Moneda de Oro, edited by Ruth Stanton and Louise Lodge.

QUETZALCOATL[1]

During the last day of his long journey over the mountains, the lone traveler realized that the words which had been ringing in his ears these many days suddenly had no meaning: "To incorporate the Indian into civilization!" The authorities in the capital had used them in explaining the mission he was to fulfill in coming into this mountainous territory.

Seating himself in the shade of a tree, his breathing became less labored and he was able to think more clearly. This he knew: he must carry out this charge which in the city he had so enthusiastically undertaken.

"An educator," he reiterated with the silent, unexpressed hope that the repetition of the words might rekindle his apostolic zeal, "needs the faith of a missionary to carry the torch of knowledge to the places where darkness and ignorance have prevailed so long. A doctor concerned with the state of health of a town must have that same limitless faith and untiring energy."

Picking up his pilgrim's staff, he continued his way.

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[1]Quetzalcoatl--a legendary, Toltec leader who was deified upon his death. This blonde deity is represented by the plumed serpent. He endeared himself to his people during his lifetime through his teachings. Quetzalcoatl, to the Mexican, symbolizes wisdom and learning.

As he approached a group of village huts, he noticed that, although the night was black, there were no lights burning, no other indications of life. The village was hemmed in on all sides by mountains. It was almost as if he were stepping into a ghost town abandoned because of the threat of crime and plunder and danger of attack.

As he drew near the door of the first house, he saw an ash-colored figure of a man on the threshold, squatting with lowered head, either asleep or deep in thought. Sensing the stranger's presence, the man fearfully jumped to his feet as if impelled to take flight.

The Indian made no reply to the first words spoken to him in Spanish. That really did not alarm the man as he had been forewarned that the people knew little of the language. Fortunately he had memorized the most indispensable words of the Indian dialect. Scarcely had greetings been exchanged when the word cocolistle[1] came to the Indian's lips as he pointed to the interior of the house.

When the teacher realized that the Indian had no objection to his intrusion, he lighted a candle and made his way into the interior of the hut. The two men sized each other up as would two travelers who might meet on a dark night with flashes of lightning zigzagging across the sky. The

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[1] cocolistle: an epidemic disease resembling typhoid.

angular face of the Indian had a sickly olive-skinned pallor found only in the copper-skinned race. His hair, long and black, fell in an irregular line across his forehead. He had no beard. The teacher had white skin. His upper lip and his cheeks had the bluish cast characteristic of a person with a heavy beard but recently shaven. The Indian wore a dirty-looking blanket; the white man, a brightly colored hunting jacket.

Candles in different parts of the hut were sending up a ghostly glow. The scene which met the teacher's eyes was a moving and pitiful one. What the householder had referred to as cocolistle was certainly seen here in epidemic proportion. On a poor, miserable bed of common reed grass and on two petates[1] spread on the floor, two women and four children lay unconscious. From time to time they called out in their delirium. Everyone in the settlement was sick and dying, the Indian explained. So many deaths that there were not enough people still walking about to bury the dead.

Since the teacher was at loss for words in the Indian dialect, silence soon fell over the two. The spectre once more squatted down and the white man sat down nearby with legs outstretched. Useless to try to look for food. All the houses were dark and filled with the victims of the dread

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[1]petate: a straw mat used for sleeping purposes.

epidemic. The teacher thought how ironical it was that at this ill-timed moment of arrival the people should need hygiene more than they needed schools; medicine, far more than learning.

Without disrobing or even taking off his shoes, he stretched out on the ground, pillowing his head in his hands. The night air and the stars provided his only covering. In the distance sounded the insistent and lugubrious howling of a dog. He had learned during the brief interchange of words between the villager and himself that other teachers had been there before him and had failed. Some could not adjust themselves to the primitive conditions; others had been forcibly ousted by irate fathers who resented their children's being taken from the fields as day laborers and put into classrooms.

Thoughts like these drifted through his mind as he neared the boundary line between wakefulness and sleep:

"How strange to have pain and suffering so close that one can almost feel them himself, to know that one's power to help be so lamentably finite! There must be thousands, yes, even tens of thousands of villages like this scattered throughout the country. What strange resistance this race has had to have survived so long. What is the reason for this tenacity of spirit which, unmanacled, is harmonious, nimble and sonorous? I'm dozing in a cemetery!"

Daybreak brought no notable change to the village. Many doors remained unopened. The emaciated Indian still crouched on the threshold. The dog still howled in the distance. A cursory walk through the streets was sufficient for the newcomer to sense the conditions under which these people had been living and dying for centuries.

He was horrified when he saw their source of drinking water. It did not come from a well but from a puddle, in fact, from several puddles, the only remaining vestige of a brook now that the season of drought was at hand. Lizard-like reptiles were contentedly swimming about in this lukewarm water. On the outer ridges of the puddles, fat, long-snouted pigs were dozing.

He passed through the houses, the streets, and the orchards. Everywhere he found the sick and the dying. Nowhere did his presence awaken the distrust which that of other white visitors had done when times were more normal.

The landscape presented a happy contrast to the suffering of the people. There were fertile but abandoned fields of yucca plants, here and there a bed of cane and cocohuacintle.[1] The mountainsides were green, the sky, blue. In the distance were snow-covered peaks. The sun gave promise of life and hope.

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[1] cocohuacintle: the wild ancestor of the sugar cane.

His first step was to advise everyone to boil water after convincing himself that the only possible water supply was that of the puddles where he had seen pigs wallowing about. To boil the water, it was necessary to gather wood on the outskirts of the village. He knew just enough of botany to know that herbs would serve as a healing potion and would help to arrest the epidemic.

The Indians, like people sentenced to death, offered no resistance. They placed their complete trust in the knowledge of that stranger whose arrival had been so providential.

One of them voiced his fear and ignorance like a person abolutely abandoned and at the mercy of evil forces in these few words:

"We are sick because the man who used to cure us died. He was a very wise sorcerer who knew how to talk to the winds, the water, and the mountains. But it was him that was one of the first to die of this sickness."

Under normal circumstances it would have been dangerous for a white man to go into the sown fields and enclosures. Now, however, with the village prostrated by illness, he went about freely, hunting for food and herbs. In the corn patches, but partially harvested at the beginning of the epidemic, he found forgotten ears of corn. In the more distant fields he dug up the nutritious Yucca plants which they had buried.

He gathered great quantities of wild fruit. The few remaining stalks of sugarcane (often found in their cornfields) the convalescents ate for dessert.

The epidemic died down and within a few weeks there was an entirely different atmosphere about the village. By night, the houses which were still inhabited were agleam with light. By day, the Indians, still weak from the ravages of disease, could be seen going out into the countryside in search of food. There were children playing in the streets. Most important, confidence had returned to the hearts of the villagers.

The teacher endeared himself to the people, not only because of his able and understanding assistance during the epidemic, but also because of the stand he took in their defense when a governmental commission arrived making demands that they pay taxes, give certain services gratis, and send a group to the capital for a political parade. With great indignation, which made his voice tremble as he spoke, he rebuked the officials about the conditions under which these villagers had been forced to live so long. It was their duty, he said, not to ask for but to give the villagers many things, such as, uncontaminated water, medicine and food.

"What have you done with all the money these poor wretched people have paid you all these centuries?" he asked passionately. "They have given you everything. What is left

to them now but the graves of their loved ones in yonder cemetery and the prospect of starvation?" To the astonishment of the villagers, the delegation departed without protest.

As the result of this encounter, other Indians arrived from distant places, asking for the teacher with blonde hair, heavy beard, and brightly-colored clothing, who that first evening had stopped to talk to the crouched form of the Indian on the threshold. That man no longer lived among them. He had changed in appearance. Sunburned and almost as brown as they, he might easily have been mistaken for one of the villagers. His only remnants of civilized dress were trousers and shoes. No longer the plaid hunting jacket nor the felt hat. His long, thick beard gave him the appearance of apostolic strength; his eyes were thoughtful; on his face was an expression of peace. At night he walked barefooted among the sick villagers like a doctor making rounds in a hospital.

How necessity had loosened his tongue! Now he spoke the Indian dialect with great fluency. The Indians, themselves, were amazed that the white man could find forms of expression which had not occurred to them in their own native tongue. Like primitive man, he gave names to things which, to that time, had been unnamed.

One morning a whirring noise was heard in the sky

above as a giant bird with metal wings passed by. The Indians were mute with astonishment. What was it, they asked, that flew so high and so steadily onward until it disappeared on the misty horizon? The teacher thought for a moment before giving them a name for it. They repeated it after him: tepospatlane, an apparatus that flies.

Like children of a certain age who, after a long and serious illness, must learn to walk again, so it was with the handful of villagers which had escaped death from cocolistle that they once more began to feel out their strength; first, in the fields, then, in the streets, and finally, in the fields.

As time passed, the only thing the teacher retained of civilization was his learning. To a casual observer, except for the wisdom of his judgments and his authoritative manner in giving advice, it would have been difficult to distinguish him from the Indians with whom he lived. The same intonation in his speech. The same gestures and the same clothing. His outward appearance, except for his beard and his slightly different cast of skin, was no different.

At night, resting from his labors in the fields, he explained the secrets of the planetary system, the influence of the moon on the sap of the plants, the reason for light and shadow, and the reason for the owl's singing near the houses. He studied and taught them the properties of

medicinal plants and new ways of hunting. That was his school, for young and old alike. Immediately following a discourse on liberty or ethics, he sometimes spent time on the rudiments of reading and arithmetic.

Among his listeners were three children lacking the authentic characteristics of either the white or Indian race. They were his children. For, when he had made his decision to stay there indefinitely, the elders of the tribe selected a wife for him whom he married according to tribal custom.

Working the land, he learned and taught at the same time the cultivation of seeds which the Indian, with the exception of corn and beans, had never sown before. It was he who established the cooperative system. Several families would work congenially and happily together in sowing the fields of a neighbor. The neighbor, in turn, was obliged to help each one who had helped him a day in return. The same system was used in weeding, in harvesting, or in building a house for a new family in the community.

When he died, they once again felt forsaken. Because they feared the return of the governmental commission and the demands it would make if it were known that the teacher was no longer with them, they circulated the report that the bearded and beautifully dressed white man had gone to Totonacapan[1] there to watch forever over them.

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[1] Totonacapan: a Toltec name for heaven.

SCARFACE

Samoya Chinchilla

Illiteracy in Spanish America is very high. Although in the present century notable attempts are being made to reduce it, the latest statistical releases of the Pan American Union show that the extremes vary from 72.4 per cent in El Salvador to 16.6 per cent in Argentina. The dereliction of the state in not assuming the responsibility for the education of the proletariat has exposed the lower classes to the insecurity of earning a livelihood in a society which has not provided for their habilitation. Individuals who with some direction might have become substantial contributing citizens, being denied it, become victims of Alcoholism, potential criminals, and, in general, unstable members of society.

The church, which just in the present century has been deprived of its high position and authority in Spanish America, while still in power used to decry in eloquent terms the deplorable condition of the poor. Ironically it was the organ which dictated the educational policies of this group of nations for centuries. Because it was bitterly opposed to education en masse, until it was dispossessed of its hold, only the favored few were given educational opportunity.

This situation has been doubly tragic and needless because of the potential wealth of these countries in natural resources.

Progressive educational programs in many of these

countries in recent years are designed to help the heretofore underprivileged to find themselves. Vocational and trade schools are equipping students with the tools essential for earning their livelihood according to individual ability and interest. Feeling that they are born to do whatever their ancestors have done is disappearing; they now have hope for advancement. This is a long term project which will require time, patience, and effort to resolve.

Samoya Chinchilla, born in Guatemala City in 1898, has traveled widely and has been employed in governmental work most of his life. Writing with him is an avocation. His first book, Madre Milpa, was published in 1935; his second, Cuatro Suertes, in 1936. He writes both legendary tales of his native land and stories based on first hand observation.

His power as a short story writer cannot be questioned. His penetrating observations of personality lead to strong, well-defined characterizations. In "Scarface" he brings out the psychological effect of environment upon the individual. His style is vigorous, arresting, and chatty.

"Scarface" is taken from Cuentos Criollos, edited by Gertrude Walsh.

SCARFACE

My wife was sitting on the edge of her chair. With his stethoscope still dangling, the old doctor pronounced his verdict:

"It's imperative that you go to a colder climate, preferably, to the country. Drink in the fresh air and sunshine. Take it easy, fellow. That's all."

At the turn of the year my wife, our first child, who was then but a babe in arms, and I took advantage of a friend's offer to put his ranch home at our disposal. It was but a half hour's drive from Guatemala City.

We found a wooden house peeking out from an orchard of fruit trees. It was truly an attractive spot situated in the clearing of a pine forest near the little Indian village of San Juan Sacatepequez.

A beautiful January it was; cold air and sunny days offered the tonic I needed and by the end of the first week, my health had already begun to improve. Life was pleasant in that little niche for a time. But soon we found that there, as everywhere in this world, we had to face certain problems.

Alice had taken the doctor's advice seriously; under no circumstance would she consider returning home again until I was completely on my feet.

"We will try to make the necessary arrangements," she

insisted, "your health comes before everything else. We'll manage somehow."

And so it was that we decided to stay. It soon became apparent that the one servant whom we had brought along with us would not provide enough help for our expanding plans. We had bought a few chickens, some rabbits, and a cow. We were planning a little vegetable garden. In addition, there were many chores such as getting the mail from the village and occasionally picking up groceries and other supplies at the village store.

The big problem was that of finding a servant in a village whose population was entirely Indian. The only channel known to people thereabouts for acquiring servants was Luis Martinez, the village storekeeper. Once having made our wants known to him, we could only hope that fate would be kind.

One afternoon at sunset a man, short in stature and in shirt sleeves, came to the door. He carried a small knapsack on his back and introduced himself by saying:

"They told me at the ranch at the bend of the river that you needed a servant. That's why I'm here."

"Do you have recommendations?" I asked.

The fellow, for a brief moment, was startled by my question. He quickly regained his composure, however, and replied brusquely:

"No, patrón, no recommendations of any sort--- I lost them."

While he was speaking, I studied him. He had clear skin and wavy, chestnut hair. Closely set but intelligent eyes looked out from beneath a low forehead. The most conspicuous thing about him, without a doubt, were two broad scars on one cheek which gave the impression of its having been slashed into two equal parts. The scars were similar to those found on the bark of the rubber tree. Before my scrutinizing gaze he appeared restless and unsure of himself.

"What wages would you want, fellow?" I queried.

"That would depend on the kind of work, patrón," he countered.

Since we needed help badly with so many little things about the place, and because he didn't seem to be too bad a bet, I closed the deal by saying:

"OK, we'll try you out for a few days. For the time being you may sleep here, and tomorrow we will talk at greater length."

Leandro (that was his name) was from the very beginning a source of great help to everyone in the family. He got up early and milked the cow. He spent his mornings working in the garden. In the afternoons he often accompanied me on my walks. All assignments, with the exception of one, he did satisfactorily and ungrudgingly. He always showed a

definite distaste for going to the village. That I could not understand. As far as I could determine, he knew no one there, for he spent his Sundays either playing his accordion or walking alone along the village outskirts. There was a quietness about the man which baffled me, but because he was a willing worker and very fond of the animals, I had no complaint to make.

One day, Luis, the old village storekeeper, came to see us. We were seated around the diningroom table chatting about the usual things: the weather, mutual acquaintances, small incidents of village life. As soon as my wife left the room, he said in a mysterious and confidential manner:

"Well, don Enrique, I had a definite reason for coming here today; there is something I must tell you."

"Go right ahead, don Luis."

"Ordinarily I don't like to interfere in other people's affairs, but I must tell you that I don't trust that fellow you have working for you here. You surely don't know who he is?"

"I don't know much about him," I admitted, "but I have no fault to find with him. He is careful with my possessions; he is intelligent; and he is trustworthy."

"Trustworthy!" exclaimed Luis in an unbelieving tone of voice. "That makes me laugh. That really makes me laugh."

"Yes, trustworthy," I reiterated, "both my wife and I

have remarked about it. He is tenderhearted, too, and kind. It was only the other day that he was taking care of my little boy. Some muleteers passed along the river road and they scoffed at him, calling him a male nurse. He's not their sort. He's good. Any man who loves children as he does cannot be bad."

"Why man alive, listen to what I'm saying," don Luis shouted, "he's Scarface."

"Scarface?" I asked uncomprehendingly. That name meant nothing to me.

"None other, he's a terrible man, don Enrique. I know what I'm talking about. That man has committed, it's hard to say, how many crimes and murders."

I stared at Luis unbelievingly.

"It just so happened," he continued, "that I, by chance, found out about this fellow. Do you recall that I told you about having a nephew who works in the muncipal secretariat at Masagua? Through him I learned that one of the chain gang working in the port of San Juan had escaped. They're a brutal bunch, hardened criminals, killers. The worst one of the lot, known the length of the Pacific Coast by the name of Scarface, is at large. His name strikes terror in the heart of everyone who hears it. As soon as I was sure that he was the man lodged in your house, I said to myself: 'I must warn don Enrique with all possible haste.'"

Dumbfounded at his tirade, I questioned:

"What has the man done?"

"He has killed his neighbors; he has killed for the pure pleasure of killing. I'm not telling you. . . ."

Leandro's entrance with a couple of wine glasses left Luis with his sentence unfinished. I looked at him then as if I were looking at a person whom I had never seen before. I looked at the little dog at his heels, a stray that he had befriended sometime before.

"No," I said under my breath, "I can't believe Luis' story."

Shooting frays are common enough in Central America. A few glasses of liquor, a few coarse jokes, a few taunting jibes and insults have spelled death for more than one peon. Alcohol makes the Indian a depraved creature. The machete need strike but once. A life is ended.

As Leandro was putting the wine glasses on the table, it seemed to me that those two scars stood out even more plainly than before. Was it only because I was becoming aware of their possible significance? Were they meant to be signals of warning to my family and me? Or, was it that my newly aroused suspicions made my glance cleave to those two deep scars? The truth finally dawned on my consciousness. Maybe he was Scarface. Even so, he couldn't be so brutal as the old storekeeper claimed. Luis said that he had killed

for the pure pleasure of killing. That was impossible; that I refused to believe.

The seed of doubt having been planted in my mind, I found myself making minute observations about him. He was a man of few words, to be sure. I tried unsuccessfully to draw him out on his past life. Only one night did he speak of himself. There come moments in life even to those who have bolted the door of the past securely when the heart must speak. I can yet recall the scene. My wife, he, with his ever faithful dog, and I were seated in the patio. It was then that he leafed through some of the pages of his lonely life. He knew very little about his mother except that his father had abandoned her. There were no happy boyhood memories. Those years which should have been spent in play in the heart of a family, in building up assurance for the years ahead consisted rather of wanderings with his drunken father from farm to farm and from mountain to mountain. He recalled his father as sullen, vicious, suspicious.

One afternoon his father fell to the ground like a half-crazed creature, spittle oozing from his mouth. For some time he thrashed about in a delirium. Then he moved no more. The terror-stricken boy, covering himself with leaves for a blanket, huddled close to the quiet form. He did not so much as dare to utter a cry throughout the long night. The next day passersby told him his father was dead. From

that day on he walked alone.

Often he was accused of murders he did not commit; once, he admitted, he did half-kill a man, but that was in self-defense. Delving deep into the entangled thicket of memory, he uttered these words:

"That man hadn't wronged me, but we came together on a luckless day. It's water under the bridge now."

Once, by mistake, the mounted police had pursued him across the mountain of the Achiotes; there had been other times too. Details of these incidents he had long since forgotten.

Passionately he burst out: "Liquor is the reason for knivings and killings, senor. The blue devils take possession of me all at once. I am not malicious, far from it; but there are days."

Here, the tone of his voice changed as he continued: "Here I have no craving for liquor. I took the cure at Chan[1] a year ago last August."

He finished speaking as abruptly as he had begun. Looking at him, I was reminded of a man standing on the edge of a precipice.

Meanwhile, the rainy season was upon us; every afternoon clouds, the color of obsidian, would pile up over

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[1]Chan: A Guatemalan village to which people go to be cured of Alcoholism.

against the western sky. I mused:

"Leandro, too, like the beclouded heavens, feels unrest." No longer did he take such painstaking care of the animals. No longer did he play those sad and melancholy songs of the Guatemalan ranch hand on his accordion. For hours at night his little dog, hidden among the thickets, whined, awaiting his master's return.

Unexpectedly one afternoon Leandro came to me and in a guilty manner blurted out: "I'm going to leave you, patrón."

"But, hombre, why?" I asked, dumbfounded. "Aren't you happy here? What's wrong? Is there something we haven't done?"

In a determined voice he continued: "No, it's not that at all. Both the senora and you are good to me. But I'm like this. All of a sudden I get these splitting headaches. I'm telling you this, patrón, because I like you. I wanted to talk to you before but I didn't dare. May the good Lord be merciful! You must let me go. I don't know what's the matter with me. But, by whatever you hold dearest in life, let me leave. Please see that they take good care of my little dog, and, if it's the Lord's will, someday I'll return for him."

I shall never forget the deathly pallor of his face, the sad eyes of that condemned and tortured being. I had

the feeling that I was looking at a man who had suddenly lost his soul. Strange! I felt no fear. On the contrary, in his presence I instinctively felt free of all danger.

Shortly afterwards, I heard the noise of a hoe in the garden. Wondering who it could be, I looked out only to see Leandro digging around the rosebushes as if nothing had happened. Not long afterwards, he told me that he had reconsidered and that he would stay on. But it was only a matter of hours before he shut himself up in his room. He even refused to come out to eat.

Without a doubt the man was ill, or at least under great emotional strain.

"Perhaps it is better for him to go," my wife said that night.

"Yes," I agreed, glancing at the cradle where our small son, with doubled-up fists, was sleeping, "it is better for him to go." The loneliness and the mystery of the night made me firm in my resolution.

When I awakened the next morning, he had gone and, as I later learned, had headed in the direction of San Juan. Once there, for some time he paced back and forth in front of one of the cantinas, drawn to the spot as if by a magnet, but resisting, with every iota of will power he possessed, the temptation to enter. All that day he was torn between two desires.

By nightfall he could stand it no longer. He entered the cantina and asked for a drink. His last defense had given way; the man was conquered. Not only one drink did he take, but another, and another. With each one, he grew more determined, more confused.

Unfortunately, about six o'clock some muleteers passed by, the same ones who a few days before had seen him carrying our little boy. They got off their horses and came in for a drink.

One of them, spitting contemptuously from the corner of his mouth, remarked: "Look, fellows, here's the man nurse!"

This sally met with loud guffaws from the gang. They roared with laughter.

That word, which a few days earlier had brought a smile to his lips, now struck him like the sudden jab of a sharp-pointed century plant hidden in the tall grass. Although he was completely inebriated, he, nonetheless, contained himself. The muleteers continued with their jests. After all, who was afraid of a male nurse?

"Look, fellows," he said at last, completely surrounded and furious, "don't egg me on, because I can be plenty tough. When I've had a few drinks, there's no one that's a match for me. You don't know me but you do remember don Enrique's child. Please don't get me into trouble. I beg

you not to do it, señores." He hoped that this warning would make a closed incident of it.

But it so happened that one of the men, made bold by the attitude Leandro had taken, shouted at him:

"OK, scram, or I'll throw you out because I don't like to drink with sissies." As he said this, he grabbed the strip of leather which muleteers always carry at their waists for blindfolding their horses, shouting:

"Get out of here right now or, so help me, I'll throw you out, you big sissy."

And so tragedy struck. The stupid and needless tragedy of our workingmen who talk too much under the influence of liquor.

Scarface, half-crazy, drew out a sharp dagger and attacked with the savage--call it courage if you will--which had made him notorious in all the villages along the coast.

He said nothing. Hate flamed from his eyes. In lightning zigzags he lunged and dodged behind his lethal blade, excited more and more by the sight of blood which stained the pavement.

Strange! In a normal state of mind he had refused to kill a hen for the next day's dinner!

Poor Scarface! He was but one of so many. A fatal mixture of heaven knows how many racial weaknesses, humiliations, outrages, and sufferings.

This I know: he would have liked to have been guided and protected during his unstable, restless, and worried life as he had protected his own little dog. He longed for protection, I know, to the very depth of his diffident and primitive soul, counting on a justice which unfortunately had never existed for him personally.

Tragedy made the hearts of the villagers heavy. Old men and women, the middle-aged, the little children at school knew it should not be. Why had it happened? No one in the village knew the answer.

They executed him one afternoon in May in the name of the law within range of cemetery walls.

At the same hour the village schoolmaster was reading a pretty literary composition on the "Untold Wealth of Central America." At the same hour the liquor dealer was doing some dismal figuring in his dusty office on the revenue the state would receive from liquor sales. At the same hour, also, the village priest was preparing a well-composed sermon on the Christian virtue of teaching him who does not know and guiding him who does not understand.

THE RAM

Luis Urbaneja Achelpohl

Whether or not the author intended that this story point to social problems of his native Venezuela is a matter of conjecture. Many of his writings carry sociological significance. Subtly in this story he calls the reader's attention to two of the most undesirable social types in Spanish America, namely, the beggar and the highwayman. The social problems which these types present in the society in which they live can be read into this story. For that reason the translator has included the story in this collection.

The highwayman is a well-known figure in Spanish American society. There are many factors which have contributed to the widespread practice of robbery. Property and wealth have been concentrated in the hands of the few. Because of this, there is a lack of sympathy toward the wealthy classes. No compunction is felt in depriving them of property by fair or foul means. Educational opportunities have been very limited.

Unfortunately the moral, spiritual, and ethical values, which could have been inculcated by the schools, had they reached this element of society, have also been neglected by the home. Opportunities for work have been poor. That society has not provided for their placement by educating them, whereby they could have become competent citizens, has contributed toward this widespread practice.

Badly-organized, trained, and equipped police forces

and the lack of effective systems of transportation and communication have hindered in the apprehension of criminals. In Venezuela, where forests are dense, detection of criminals has been made even more difficult. Climatic conditions, too, have favored their roaming at large.

One of the most striking and at times most repulsive figures which attracts the attention of a tourist in Spanish America is the ubiquitous beggar. Of all ages and of both sexes the beggars are found in public markets, near churches, on the busy thoroughfares, in parks, and at hotel entrances. With outstretched hands and in a plaintive tone of voice they bemoan their fate and beg for any pittance the donor may wish to give.

In our own country at times we endure an occasional panhandler. Our broad program of rehabilitation for cripples and our careful concern for the aged make it unnecessary for either class to resort to asking for alms. "Why," we ask ourselves, "are beggars so prevalent in many of the Spanish American countries?" Their presence is not due to the impoverishment of the countries. It is necessary to look more deeply for the answer.

Beggars would soon disappear from the streets if the public were to stop dropping coins into their hands and cups. There are social agencies in Spanish America which offer provision for the aged and needy. Wages are not good, to be

sure, and opportunities for advancement in the trades are certainly not comparable to those in the United States. Nevertheless, able-bodied men and women are able to earn money enough to keep body and soul together.

Consequently, if they resort to begging as a means of earning a livelihood, they do so because the compensation is greater. Beggars are organized into guilds in many of the larger centers and many are as wealthy as the people from whom they beg pittances.

What amazes the North American most is that donations are made not only with the idea of getting rid temporarily of a persistent beggar, but also in the spirit of duty and pleasure. Women rarely fail to make contributions when a beggar gets in the way. The idea of duty performed is illustrated by a remark made by a Mexican lady to a friend from the United States: "Whenever I go shopping, I feel that my Christian duty has been accomplished if I drop a few pennies in a beggar's cup."

It would seem that the widespread predisposition in Spanish America to give to the needy is rooted to a large extent in religion, influenced a bit by superstition.

To encounter at times even able-bodied men and women living on the alms of the public in countries where work of some type can be found seems an unnecessary social defect. The public's attitude of acceptance and tolerance of the

beggar must be changed before he will disappear.

Born in Caracas, Luis Manuel Urbaneja Achelpohl (1873-1937) spent most of his life in the city itself and in its environs. He is not so well-known as many other Spanish American writers because with the exception of four novels, relatively few of his works have been published. He was a collaborator for the magazines, Cosmópolis, and El Cojo Ilustrado for many years. Many of his short stories and tales have not been published. Rufino Blanco-Fombona, who is recognized as one of the most dynamic writers of Spanish America and one of the foremost literary critics of Venezuela, speaks with high praise of him as one of Venezuela's strongest exponents of Criollismo.

"The Ram" is from Cuentos Criollos, edited by Gertrude Walsh.

THE RAM

Curious, alarmed groups at street intersections and on the highway were repeating: "The Ram! The Ram!"

Along the highway the sun cast an indistinct golden glow on clouds of swirling dust.

No one had seen The Ram, but the armed mob, falling over each other in pursuit, was sure that he was nearby. With such a man at large, no one could sleep with his doors open as was the custom in that neighborhood.

As usual The Ram had disappeared from sight at the tragic moment when his pursuers had taken good aim at him and when, by merely pulling the trigger of the gun, they could have made his broad chest a veritable sieve of bullet holes. The bandit had fled before them like a blinding cloud and had disappeared. The Ram knew many magic words.

Inquisitive men and women were returning home, commenting on what had happened. It was the same old story. He had created general havoc. It had ended by his having his own way. He was probably far away by this time.

Everything in the countryside was peaceful and calm. In the ford of the river clear, clean water murmured. On the weathervane of the church a golden spot of light shone forth. In the midst of the cane and the thickets, the last sunbeams of the day played. A silky twilight was just

descending.

A dirty and ragged beggar with a bloated face, thick lips, and dark skin was dragging a deformed and swollen foot. Over one shoulder he carried a coarse, loosely-woven beggar's knapsack. He was making an effort to cross the river by jumping from one flat, slippery, slimy rock to another, feeling out the solidity of the rocks with a long pole and favoring his misshapen ankle all the while. His balance was precarious and the light blinded him. He fell backwards on the rocks.

Drawn by the plaintive moaning of the beggar, a man rose up from the thickets. He was of medium stature and his eyes shown. His glance was vague but over the hard lines of his mouth a kindly and gentle expression wandered. He raised his eyes and looked around. His glance was long and searching.

He jumped into the river and as if the beggar were a child, he carried him gently to the slope. The deformed ankle was bleeding. He could scarcely bring himself to touch the rotting, bruised skin. Nonetheless, he examined the wound and began to wash it with the river water as a mother would wash a child. The flow of blood did not stop; although it was not violent, it was continuous. Thick tears welled up in the beggar's swollen eyelids.

Everything was calm and shadowy in the solemnity of

the afternoon.

Bending to the earth, the man searched for herbs and crushed them to a pulp with his fingers. He applied them to the wound and since the beggar had nothing for a bandage, he unbuttoned his plowman's shirt which covered him from his neck to the calves of his legs and took out a silk handkerchief. It was one of those bright handkerchiefs of pure silk which the people of the Canary Islands like to give us in their contraband commerce.

The beggar said not a word as the man went about caring for his wound.

When the flow of blood ceased, the man applied the handkerchief bandage. There was not the slightest stain on it. A smile of satisfaction passed over his lips.

The man said: "Don't be afraid. The herbs will heal your wound."

The beggar murmured: "Thanks. I'm cured." When he made an unsuccessful attempt to rise, the man extended both hands cordially and lifted him to his feet.

The beggar's clothes were soaked; they clung to his body. The man took off his plowman's shirt and while he was covering him with the long, shirtlike blouse, the beggar examined him intently and admiringly. Under the coarse shirt, he wore a fine linen suit. One detail he observed above all else: his eyes were brilliant, very brilliant, and his hair,

light and curly.

The man put the pole in his hands once more and picked up the beggar's knapsack from the ground. Upon seeing that it was empty, he unbuttoned his wide sash from which hung a dagger and a high calibre revolver. As he was drawing out several fifty cent pieces, a golden coin rolled out. He looked at it an instant, threw it into the knapsack with the rest of the money, and said: "It must be meant for you because it came out by itself."

The beggar wanted to kiss his hands. It was a treasure he had never dreamed of having. He thanked and blessed him. A sense of gratitude overwhelmed him.

Nonchalantly the man turned to him and said: "I do you a good turn today and you may do something for me tomorrow."

The sun no longer dazzled the beggar's eyes. The village was not far away. The autumn afternoon was full of sunlight. He walked along carefree and happy without so much as paying attention to his deformed foot.

The lamplighter had not yet begun his nightly rounds. His ladder leaned against the wall near the lamp he always lighted first. Inside the tavern he was having a round of drinks and chatting about the last exploit of The Ram with the others gathered there. In Zuata, they said, he had killed a man with a dagger thrust.

The beggar stuck his bloated face in the tavern door. Everyone was silent at the sight of him. They fully expected to hear his pleading voice ask for charity and to see his dirty hat extended to receive the alms. Instead, strangely enough, he made straightway to the bar and asked for a drink. Beneath the plowman's shirt he felt the dampness of his clothes. He was hungry and thirsty. He drank brandy and patiently began to chew the beggar's hard bread.

The others, paying no attention to him now, kept up their chatter.

The lamplighter mused: "As for his having magic powers, he certainly has them."

The bartender replied: "Let me get a shot at him with my shotgun and he won't have 'em for long."

The big, strapping halfbreed interjected: "I'd like to find The Ram to get the five hundred pesos for him dead or alive."

A greasy negro added: "That's easy. He's a big blonde with eyes as large as two silver dollars. Go and look for him in the mountains. When you catch him, I'll give you a drink of brandy."

The lamplighter broke in with: "I can already taste that drink. Brandy is the best drink for wakes."

The beggar, having trouble in chewing the casabe[1]

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[1]casabe--tapioca

cake, thought to himself: "The man at the river! The man that helped me at the river is The Ram, the sorcerer with the mortgaged soul. If I got the reward, I wouldn't have to beg any more. I wouldn't have to pull myself along the highways. I could have my leg cured and with that money, the doctors would take an interest in me."

The beggar put his hand in his saddlebag in search of another cake and his fingers touched the coins. There was the precious gold piece. Again the thought struck his mind: "The Ram must have lots of them. He's free with his gifts. He's a good-hearted fellow. These fellows look down on me; they wouldn't have washed my foot. I wonder why a fellow who kills and robs on the highway pitied me."

He recalled his eyes and his taffy-colored hair, his hard mouth, and his gentle smile.

On the street the trotting of a horse was heard. The beggar turned around to see. A man with high boots and a sheepskin blanket on the pummel of his saddle was passing by. He urged his steed to a full gallop as he went by the tavern. Their glances met. The beggar's mouth opened wide, then closed.

The tavernkeeper craned his head out the door to see. The horseman disappeared in the distance. The tavernkeeper observed: "Fine animal."

The beggar said to himself: "It's The Ram! I saw

his eyes; they shone like two coins but wounded like two daggers."

The lamplighter said: "I'm going to light the street lamps."

The greasy negro, making fun of the Indian, said: "Why didn't you go to look for The Ram? Be careful that you don't find him tonight curled up in your hammock. They're all out tonight looking for him but woe to him that finds him."

The beggar muttered to himself: "It was him, it was him that was running away. He killed one man and robbed another. I wonder who he killed. I wonder who he robbed."

Four armed men were approaching on the run. They rushed into the tavern saying: "Didn't you see him go by?"

"Who? Who?"

"The Ram! The Ram! He has stolen the general's piebald mare, his saddle, and his boots."

Everyone, scandalized, gasped in astonishment.

"Someone went by."

"On the piebald mare?"

The bartender turned to beggar. "You went out to look. Was it a piebald mare?"

"I didn't see one."

"Turn the colt loose," snapped the bartender, "it'll go after its mother."

"Sure," agreed the Indian, "turn her loose and the five hundred pesos will be ours."

The armed men let the colt loose and took off after it. The lamplighter was lighting his lamps. The beggar had hastened away, limping along the street. He had disappeared like a shadow. He was already out of town and on the highway. He stopped at the bend of the road at a narrow and dangerous place. He crouched against the bank. Soon he heard the trotting of the colt. It was a very young colt. In the distance men's voices, drawing nearer and nearer, were heard. The voices of volunteers, each eager to claim the reward for himself. The colt reached the beggar's hiding place. He lifted his staff with both hands and brought it down with full force on the animal's head, stunning him. With the second blow, the colt rolled down into the gorge.

Heading for a coffee grove, he repeated to himself: "I do a good turn for you today, and you may do something for me tomorrow."

Venus, in the west, shone like a golden coin.

THE DESERTER

Rafael Delgado

In countries whose history has been tinctured by almost constant political uprising, vast numbers of young men have been recruited and unwillingly forced into the service of the army. In many cases they have not been interested in nor informed about the causes for which they are fighting. The illiterate peon has felt a lack of sympathy and resentment toward the higher social classes. His want of opportunity to better his economic condition has resulted in his being devoid of a sound basic civic responsibility. The absence of patriotic zeal and intelligent understanding of the issues involved in war lead to large-scale desertion. The proportion of deserters, particularly in Mexico, has been enormous. Contributing factors have been that the armies have been poorly clothed and fed and have received little or no remuneration.

An undesirable social element has been created and banditry has been inevitable. Displacement in society and inability to earn a living cause deserters to become outlaws. In the general upheaval and unrest which follow in war's wake and under the lawless conditions prevalent at such times, these unfortunates roam about committing atrocities without much danger of apprehension and seeking revenge upon a society which they do not comprehend. Poorly organized and equipped police have been unable to cope with the problem successfully, hindered as they are also by climatic conditions

and dense forests in many areas of the Spanish American countries.

Patriotic duty which impels our young men to rally to the defense of their country because they feel and know that they are fighting for the continuation and preservation of their own individual rights and privileges under a democratic system of government has not been a common compelling motive in Spanish America.

Rafael Delgado (1853-1914), the author of "The Deserter," was born in Vera Cruz, Mexico. Essentially he was a writer of the novel although a few of his short stories have been published. As a writer of the short story in the early twentieth century, he aided in its development before it attained its present popularity.

"The Deserter" is from the book, Antología de Cuentos Americanos, by L. A. Wilkins.

THE DESERTER

It was ten o'clock in the morning. The hot sun was parching the little ravine along the river. The heat waves were rising over the plain and enveloping the surrounding hills in a thick haze. Not the slightest breeze was moving the foliage. The harvest flies were buzzing in the thickets. A woodpecker was busy pecking at the hard wood of the Ceiba tree. Along the banks of the river the sand glistened like small diamonds. Moving in picturesque circles, a swarm of multi-colored butterflies hovered over the puddles in search of coolness and moisture.

The forests of *huarumbos*,[1] wild fig trees, banana plants, blooming *jonotes*,[2] and the wild orchids perfuming the air with their fragrance, invited the weary to this place of quiet repose.

In the somber coffee grove, on the far-distant foothill of the sierra, there were movement, shouting, and the noise of rustling leaves and plantings. The sky above the seacoast was blanketed in cumulous clouds against which the wild ducks were outlined in moving ribbons and triangles. In the foreground was the checkered pattern of the gloomy

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[1] *huarumbos*: cotton trees.

[2] *jonotes*: trees producing fibre from which cord is made.

coffee plantations, rustling banana patches, murmuring cornfields, and the large groves of cedar and ceiba trees sighing in the morning breeze. The harvest flies, drunk with the morning heat, and the busy woodpecker thumped out a rhythm with the repeated blows of his steel beak.

Not far away, a gigantic mango tree silhouetted itself against the landscape. From its spherical top sounded the calls of the many birds nesting in its branches. In its shade were two reed houses with pyramidal, thatched roofs: one, quite small which served as a kitchen and granary; the other, larger and commodious, the residence of the respected family of the old man, Juan.

In the yard the red and black rooster was crowing, very proud of his harem of forty. The penned-up brooding hens were clucking angrily. The laying-hens were cackling maternally. The little chicks of the late summer nestings were cheeping. On the porch pavement, Ali, the old, lovable dog, was dreaming of his deceased master. With a shake of his tail and a growl he drove off an occasional fly.

On a steel picket of his forked perch, a yellow-headed parrot chattered without stopping: "Polly, Polly! Are you married? Ha, ha, ha! What a joke!"

The boys were out somehwere in the cornfields, the coffee groves, or the pasture. The two girls--Lucia, with the large black eyes, and Mercedes, with the graceful body--

were busy in the kitchen. Smoke was pouring from the kitchen chimney. The air smelled of burning green wood. The lively, happy patting of the tortillas in the making seemed to say: "Come and get it!"

The señora Luisa, spectacles on nose, was seated knitting in a large, comfortable chair on the porch. The cat sound asleep at her feet. This unfortunate woman, formerly so strong and lively, looked old and dejected. Three long years of mourning had not lessened her grief. Time passed slowly. It was impossible for her to forget Juan, her "poor old man," as she was wont to call him. Not for one instant was her mind free of the memory of that horrible, stormy, bloody night when, there on Jobo hill, some bandits killed the fine, old farmer as he was returning home from town.

"What good does it do?" she was thinking, "that there is an abundance of everything in the house? That the coffee trees are bending low with the weight of their fruit? That the cornfields promise an abundant crop? That the herds of stock are the envy of all who see them? What does it matter? What is the use of it if the one above all others who should enjoy it, the one who worked so long and hard to achieve it, is no longer here?"

The good, old lady stuck her needle in the yarn, removed her glasses, and wiped her cheeks with the corner of a large handkerchief. She sighed, crossed herself, and prayed

quietly, very quietly.

The deserter was out in the field with Antonio. The poor fellow, a good worker, was very eager to help the boys. It was his way of repaying them for their hospitality and kindness. He used to care for the livestock when the boys went to town; he split wood, shelled corn, and carved spoons and other utensils. At night, after supper and the evening prayer, he often read. He knew how to read and write very well. Señora Luisa was very fond of him. The deserter--this was what all of them called him--returned the old lady's affection by reading to her the lives of the saints from an old moth-eaten volume of the Christian Year. He kept out of the sight of strangers, fearful of being recognized and turned over to the authorities. But here on this ranch he was safe, protected by these honest and simple people, who, pitying him, treated him as if he were one of the family. Lucía and Mercedes were considerate of his slightest wishes. The boys frequently brought him cigars and cigarettes when they went to the village. Antonio gave him a blue flannel blouse, Pedro, a pair of new trousers, and Señora Luisa, a pair of cowhide boots. The poor fellow had been almost destitute of clothing upon his arrival.

The boys had found him asleep one morning in the coffee grove, ill and almost dying of hunger. Awakening him, they put him on a horse, and brought him to the house.

He told the family many of his interesting war experiences: the critical encounters with the wild Indians and the horrors of the insurrection. These tales frightened the widow and she could not comprehend why men should kill each other in this manner when there was so much work for them to do in the untilled fields.

The deserter said that he was from Sonora. He had been taken away from his family by conscription. He had been happy and contented in his home with his wife and two children--a little girl, who was scarcely able to crawl, and an intelligent boy whose school work was the pride of the teacher. He admitted that he had deserted from the army because he was fed up and disgusted with its slavery. He had realized fully that, if caught, he would be shot without fail.

When he talked of these things, Señora Luisa always became emotional. She always assured him that he was safe here in the secluded ranch where he was provided with the necessities of life. She promised him that, whenever he wished and deemed it to his advantage to depart, he would be given a horse and money for his trip, not much perhaps, but whatever they could afford. The unfortunate, grateful fellow, with tearful eyes, promised to do what he could for his protectors.

As yet the boys had not returned from the fields.

Señora Luisa was busy with her work. The girls were preparing lunch. There was a sound of strange voices along the pathway leading to the house. Five men, armed with carbines, arrived. It was a patrol led by a lieutenant.

"Good morning."

"Good morning to you," murmured the widow putting aside her work. "Come in."

"My good friend, how are you getting along on these days? And how are the girls, Pedro, and Antonio?"

"They're fine, my friend. May the good Lord be praised! Pull up a bench here and be seated. Why are you making us this visit?"

"Ah! My friend. Business."

"Are you coming to take away my sons?"

"No."

"It looks like it; you've come with an armed patrol."

"No. My dear friend. . . there is a certain matter . . . there in office. . ."

"Soon my sons are going to harvest their crop. On the last day of harvest they are going to have a celebration. You are invited to come with all your friends to enjoy the occasion. I do not want them to dance, but what is one to do? Let them have a good time, I guess. They are still young! Your old friend, my Juan, is the only one who will not be here to enjoy the occasion. You remember well," she

added tenderly, with a deep sigh, "how old Juan used to enjoy himself. He used to act like a young boy at dances!"

"You are right, my dear friend, but do not worry. Without God's will, not even a leaf of the cornfields moves. It is not for us to know the cause of these misfortunes. We can only pray for the soul of the deceased."

The lieutenant endeavored to console the old lady, who was in tears by this time.

"What is your object in coming here, Pablo?"

"An order from the judge. Here it is." He took from his trouser pocket a folded paper. "The fact is that you have a man hidden here."

Señora Luisa trembled at his unexpected statement.

"A man?"

"Yes, lady, a man who is a criminal. You have him concealed here, but you do not know who he is. . . for if you only knew!"

"Well, who is he?"

"They say. . . the judge says that he is a cunning . . ."

"To tell you the truth," replied the elderly lady putting aside a horrible presentiment and controlling her feelings, "to admit the truth, we did have an unfortunate deserter here. He came and asked us for hospitality. We gave it to him. . . . You know! God commands us to help

the hungry and give shelter to the wanderer. But the poor fellow left. He left. . . last week on Sunday. So you fellows have come too late. It is best this way. The poor fellows! They force them into the army; afterwards, if they desert, they shoot them."

"Yes, my friend, that is very true, but the man who was here does not belong to that class; he is not a deserter as you people here think."

"Well, then. . . What is he?"

"I. . . to admit the truth, my dear friend, I hate to tell you, but a deserter. . . he is not a deserter. In the court of justice, they told me he was. . ."

"Out with it, for God's sake!"

"That he. . . well. . . one of those who. . . one of those men who wronged you, my friend, one of the gang who killed my old friend Juan."

"Really?" shouted the old woman as pale as a corpse by this time. The lieutenant nodded his head.

"No! Don't you believe it! It must be a lie."

The old lady had uttered the words feigning calmness, but vengeance flashed in her eyes. Unintentionally she cast angry glances towards the coffee grove where the murderer was hiding.

"It is true, my friend. The others were caught and all of them talked and confessed. They will be shot."

"Well, if it is true, it's God's will. It's God's will. He is forgiven. Thanks to the Holy Mary he left here. Oh, I can't believe it! Don't you believe it either! The others did not tell the truth. That man did not have the face of a murderer, my friend. If you could only have seen him! If you could have heard him read the lives of the saints! If you wish, search the house. If he were here, I, myself, would deliver him to you. Yes, with these very hands, I would hand him over to the authorities so that he would pay for his crime. That is what all these criminals deserve. May they be hanged from a tree!"

The lieutenant and his companions left. Shortly afterwards, the boys came from the fields. The deserter, fearing that he might be seen, remained in the coffee grove.

The widow and her daughters were talking on the porch when Pedro and Antonio came in. Antonio, a large, strong, and courageous looking farmer lad, carried a machete from his belt. He listened very attentively to his mother's words.

"But, who talked?"

"Who knows? Perhaps the overseer of X Ranch?"

"Well, Mom," Antonio replied in a calm and frank manner as he pushed his broad-brimmed hat back on his head, "the best thing to do is to get him out of here at once. We will give him the piebald mare. No, the little gray pony will be

better; he is a little old, but he still moves along all right if you touch him lightly with the spurs. In fact, if you just speak to him sharply, he can't be seen for the dust. I'll give him my revolver, too, and a little money, enough for the first few days."

"Just as you wish, just as you wish, but do it at once."

"All right, you, Pedro, go over there on the other side of the ravine. I'll send him over there to you. You give him the horse with the old saddle, and tell him that they are his. Tell him to write us, and not let the authorities catch him because, if they do, they will shoot him. You, Lucía, pick up his belongings and put them in a suitcase. Put in twenty pesos and my serape. Hurry up! I believe that I will bring him here so that he can say goodbye to you."

"No, Antonio! I should say not! I do not want to see him here!" she exclaimed excitedly struggling with her conscience.

"Why not?"

". . . What if the lieutenant should return?"

"You are right. Then, I will say goodbye to him over there."

When Antonio returned to the house, the widow and her daughters were out on the porch, waiting to see the fugitive cross the narrow, dangerous bridge over the gorge that

separated the farm land from the hill country.

"He is leaving us with tears in his eyes. He did not want to go. He did not want to. He told me to tell you many things: not to forget him; that he will write us when he gets home; and that if they catch him and shoot him, that you pray for his soul."

"Poor fellow!" murmured the girls as they wept silently. Señora Luisa said nothing. She could stand it no longer. She called her son aside and said to him in a low voice: "Do you know who that man is?"

"No."

"He is one of the gang that killed your father."

The heroic woman could say no more; she covered her face with her hands.

Antonio rushed into the house and returned with a rifle.

At that precise moment the deserter, with his suitcase strapped to the saddle, had just come to the bridge. Before starting across, he turned in his saddle to bid farewell to the people who were watching him from the house.

"Goodbye, goodbye." he called.

Antonio cocked the rifle and aimed it. When the mother heard the click of the rifle, she rushed towards him shouting:

"Don't shoot, my son! Don't shoot! God is looking

at you!"

The young man lowered the gun slowly. Scornfully he threw it down on the ground. He stood there silent, withdrawn for some moments. Then without saying a word, slowly, very slowly, he drew near his mother and embraced her.

Lucía and Mercedes looked at each other in amazement.

The deserter crossed the bridge, climbed the little hill, and was soon lost from view in the woods.

The parrot on his stake began to chatter:

"Are you married? Ha! Ha! Ha! What a joke!"

CONTRACT LABORERS

Horacio Quiroga

In the heart of South America, and belonging to the La Plata basin, lies an area of 300,000 square miles covered with marshes, dense tropical jungle, lagoons, and forest still largely unexplored and containing incalculable wealth in forest products. Here, in the Chaco region, lie extensive tracts of quebracho colorado, an extremely valuable product because of its use in tanning leather.

But the development of the quebracho extract has ramifications which lead the scholar into a study of international trade, high finance, chemical laboratories, explorations, social conditions and, finally, to the contract laborer without whom the quebracho tree, its wood products, and extracts could never be developed and used in modern civilization.

The magnitude of operations required in the quebracho extraction industry can best be understood in view of the fact that three and one-half tons of logs are required to produce one ton of extract. It has been estimated that fifty million dollars for this industry has been invested in Argentina alone.

As the Gaucho was to the pampas, so was the native labor used in the Chaco for the exploitation of its timber resources. But whereas the Gaucho enjoyed his work and thrived, the illiterate contract laborers went to work at the expense of their health and, because of the sevérely unhealthful conditions, sometimes at the cost of their lives.

The Gaucho enjoyed his work; the contract laborer was led into it by ignorance and, in many cases, bound to it by trickery-induced indebtedness.

Let us look, briefly, at the territory where the rugged, long-lived but slow-growing quebracho colorado flourishes: many rivers and streams, navigable only during the rainy seasons, inundate vast stretches of the low-lying areas and create, in addition to valuable forestry, pestilential hazards to human existence. The struggle to survive reduces illiterate and poorly protected laborers to animal-like brutality.

All this is well known to the superintendents whose job it is to contract laborers for this dangerous work of getting timber from the malarial swamps. Well known to them, too, is the character of the ignorant Indians and peons. Credulous and easily duped, these simple souls are dazzled into signing contracts, which, in exchange for cheap, showy goods and coins, require of them Herculean labors under harsh conditions. They drink the company liquor, they sign the company papers, buy the company supplies and then, already indebted beyond contract ability to pay, they are loaded onto the company boat and taken to their miserable destiny.

By end of contract time their excess of suffering quickly leads them into the counter-balancing excess of indulgence--at the company store where more liquor and more contracts seal their doom.

Thus, for more than a century, has foreign and local capital mercilessly exploited Argentine forests and enslaved Argentine contract laborers.

Horacio Quiroga was born December 31, 1878 in Salto, Uruguay and died in 1937. Quite by accident his interest in writing developed. Hearing his friend, Brignole, later his biographer, read some verses, prompted by the spirit of rivalry, he also began to compose poetry at the age of eighteen. He never had an interest in either politics or religion.

His position as the number one short story writer of Spanish America is uncontested. He proved his genius both as a writer of animal stories and those which deal with psychologically abnormal situations. Because of his talent with the former he has often been compared to Kipling; with the latter, to Poe. Whereas Poe gained his effect in characterization and in plot by striking a note of terror, Quiroga has been likened to "an artistic surgeon who operates on the human emotions with a scientific precision."[1]

"Contract Laborers" deals with the section of the Misiones in the northern part of the Argentine with which the author was well-acquainted.

This story is from Horacio Quiroga, Sus Mejores Cuentos, edited and compiled by John A. Crow.

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[1]John R. Crow, Horacio Quiroga, Sus Mejores Cuentos, (Mexico D.F.: Editorial Cultura, 1943), p. xxiii.

THE CONTRACT LABORERS

Seventeen contract laborers in the lumber industry were on board the river boat, Silex, bound for Posadas. Their contracts completed, they were receiving free passage back to headquarters.

Estaban Podeley, commonly known as Pode, had just finished a nine-month contract. Cayetano Maidana, nicknamed Cayé, had just worked off his of a year-and-a-half in the forests.

These two men were typical contract laborers: unkempt, dirty and gaunt. They were literally devouring the metropolis of the forest with their eyes. For this was the Jerusalem and Golgotha of their lives. They were returning to it after nine months up the river! A year and a half! The memory of their arduous labors in the forest was growing dim in the anticipation of the pleasures they were about to enjoy.

For the week's spree, to which the river boat was carrying them, they could depend upon the money advanced on a new contract. Only two of the hundred laborers who happened to be in Posadas at the time were out of debt. A group of girls of happy disposition and sad profession were waiting on the shore for them. They were the intermediaries and coworkers of the organization which hired the lumber jacks.

When the sex-starved men saw them they shouted out with one accord, "Hubba! Hubba!"

Cayé and Pode got off the boat, their heads reeling with the thought of the orgies about to be indulged in. Three or four of the girls latched on to them immediately. It didn't take long for them to get drunk. It didn't take long for them to sign a new contract, either. For what kind of work? Where? They didn't know, nor did they care. What they did know was that they had forty pesos in their pockets and credit in a larger amount for supplies.

Dull and silly with fatigue, and alcoholically good-natured, they followed their shrewd girl friends of the moment into a store or commissary owned by the company which was going to employ them, I am not sure which. The girls bedecked themselves in flashy, elegant clothes and a profusion of new ribbons and frills. The alcoholic gallantry of their companions made this cold-blooded venture very simple, for the girls, of course, were to receive a percentage commission on all such purchases. The ability to squander was the outstanding characteristic of this crowd of men whom they were employed to mislead.

Cayé's new clothes were permeated with the nauseating and mixed odor of a number of lotions and oils. Pode, a bit wiser, contented himself with a new woolen suit. It was more likely that they overpaid the indistinctly mentioned total

of the bill. It was simple to toss a wad of money onto the counter.

An hour later these over-elegantly dressed fellows with ponchos draped over their shoulders, boots on their feet, and .44 revolvers at their belts were hurrying to catch an open taxi. What made the picture even more ludicrous was the sight of cigarettes drooping loosely from the corner of their mouths and handkerchiefs hanging from every pocket.

Two girls, attracted by this showy display of wealth and worldly possessions, followed them about all morning and afternoon thinking it worth while, no doubt, to put up with the mixed odor of perfume, alcohol, and tobacco. The fact that the lumberjacks were equally impressed with themselves showed up in their bored, nonchalant expressions.

Night came and with it the dance. The two girls who had joined them earlier urged them to drink more and more. Under the influence of liquor their prodigality with money, which they had not yet earned, was astounding. They threw a ten dollar bill on the bar for a bottle of beer and received a dollar and a half in change. After all, they were enjoying themselves too much to count the change before they pocketed it. So it continued, this driving compulsion to spend seven days as big shots to compensate for the prolonged misery of their rigorous labors.

It was time for the Silex to go up the river again.

Cayé and Pode, intoxicated like the rest of the peons, found a place on the deck. Cayé had found a girl who was willing to go back with him. Ten mules, dogs, bundles, trunks, men and a few women were crowded together in close contact.

By the next day their heads had cleared a bit so they decided to examine their account books. It was the first time they had done this since they had received their new contracts. Cayé had received a hundred twenty-five pesos and thirty-five pesos in supplies; Pode, a hundred thirty-five pesos in cash and seventy-five pesos in supplies. They looked at each other with an expression which might have been called fright, except that lumberjacks are unable to experience such emotion. They had no recollection of ever having spent even a fifth of that amount.

"What the devil," murmured Cayé. "I'll never be able to work out my contract."

Right then and there came the idea of escaping.

The reality of the life they had led in Posadas for a week was still clear enough to Cayé to make him jealous of the larger advance Pode had received.

"You're lucky. Your advance on wages is bigger than mine."

"Well, you have a girl friend. That costs money, you know."

Cayé looked at the girl. Her satin outfit, with its

yellow blouse and the green skirt, the Louis XV shoes, the triple strand of pearls on her dirty neck, the heavily-rouged cheeks, the half-open languorous eyes, and the cigarette contemptuously held. He was satisfied with her. Beauty and moral qualities carry little weight in the lumberjack's selection of a girl.

He looked first at the girl and then at his .44 revolver. He decided that the revolver was the only thing of material worth that he had left. Even this last possession was running the risk of being lost although he felt little temptation to gamble.

Not far away on an up-turned trunk some lumberjacks were gambling at monte.[1] Cayé looked on for a while, laughing as laborers always do when they are drinking together.

He decided to put five cigarettes down on a card. It was a very modest beginning, but it might grow into a sum sufficiently large to replace his advance payment and defray his passage back to Posadas. Then he would be free to do as he pleased at Posadas next time.

He lost; he lost the rest of his cigarettes, his poncho, his boots, the girl's necklace, five pesos and his .44. The next day he did get his boots back; that was all. The girl smoked one cigarette after another as if to compen-

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[1] Monte: a card game resembling Black Jack.

sate for the pearls no longer around her neck.

After changing hands many times, Pode won a box of soap which he successfully gambled against a machete and a half-dozen pairs of socks. He was very satisfied with his luck.

They finally arrived at their destination. The peons climbed along the interminable clay paths which led up the river bank. Looking down from the bank, the Silex appeared wretched and heavy in the melancholy river. With shouts and oaths they gladly bade adieu to the steamer which needed several hours of deck-washing to rid it of the stench of filth, camphor, and sick mules with which it had been infested for four long days.

Pode received seven pesos a day for his work and the work wasn't too hard. He was accustomed to the company's plundering in the matter of measuring the amount of work done. If he didn't pretend to notice, he could afford to take certain other privileges unnoticed by the company.

His new job began the next day as soon as his particular zone of labor was marked out. First he constructed his shed of palm leaves which had a roof and a wall on the south side because the cold winds came only from that direction. He gave the name "bed" to the eight poles loosely fastened together. He hung his week's supplies on a forked stick.

His monotonous days of work began once more. Every

morning, long before sunrise he would drink his cup of strong mate in silence. Next in line was his trip through his zone in search of lumber for the day. His breakfast, at eight o'clock every morning, consisted of jerked beef, flour, and grease. Then hours of work with an axe. Perspiration washed away the horse flies and mosquitoes from his bare breast. For lunch he always had beans and corn floating in the inevitable grease. Another struggle with the eight inch by thirty-foot timbers. Then his lonely supper consisting of the leftovers from dinner.

Aside from disputes with other laborers who invaded his territory and the boredom of rainy days which would force him to squat for hours in front of the mate kettle, one day was much like another.

On Saturday afternoon he washed his clothes and on Sunday he went to the commissary for the next week's provisions. This was the moment of relaxation for the lumberjacks. Cursing good-naturedly, they forgot all their hardships. With native fatalism they bore up under the ever-increasing prices of provisions: five pesos for a machete, forty centavos for a pound of crackers. This same fatalism, which made them shrug off injustices with a smile and a "What's the difference?", also manifested itself in a desire for revenge and a shirking of their tasks whenever and however much it was possible. All sensed it with varying degrees of in-

tensity. When the gnawing desire for justice did take form, it would really hurt (the bosses). The latter took every known precaution in watching the workers, especially the contract laborers, day and night.

The lumberjacks were busy felling trees in the forest. Whenever the mules were unable to check the hoist as it was being lowered at full speed, there was a confusion of logs, beams, carts, and mules accompanied by a crescendo of noise. There was always a great deal of hubbub at such times although mules were rarely hurt.

Cayé, regardless of what mood he happened to be in, had had his fill of knotty logs and left-overs. The thought of escape was always in his mind. He was holding back because he didn't have a revolver. He didn't like the thought of the foreman's Winchester. Oh, if he only had a .44!

Luck came to him in a strange disguise. Cayé's woman no longer was wearing her luxurious attire. She was washing clothes for the men now. One day she left. Cayé waited for two nights, and on the third he went to the house of her new man and gave her a severe beating. Afterwards the two men took to chatting and decided it would be a good idea to move in together since it would be economical. Since the seducer seemed to be very fond of the woman (a rare occurrence in this type of men), Cayé offered to trade her off for a revolver and bullets. It was a simple enough business arrange-

ment, but it nearly fell through, because at the last minute Cayé upped his price by insisting upon a metre of chewing tobacco, too. This price seemed too high to the other lumberjack, but they finally reached an agreement. Cayé spent that afternoon conscientiously loading and re-loading his new .44 and drinking mate with his former girl friend and her lover.

Autumn was drawing to a close. What had been five minute showers were now becoming continuous rains. The dampness was bringing aches and pains to the laborers' back. Pode had been feeling quite well, but one day he felt such a distaste for his work that he stopped and just stood there. He had no heart for anything. As he turned back to his little shed, he felt a tickling up and down his spine.

He knew very well what tickling and lethargy presaged. They were the first symptoms of the ague. Philosophically he sat down and drank a cup of mate. A half an hour afterwards he felt a long and severe chill run up and down his back. There was nothing he could do. He threw himself on the bed and curled up in his poncho. His teeth chattered and his body shook.

The next day he had another attack at noon although he had not expected one until evening. He managed to get to the commissary to ask for quinine. His face showed every evidence of the disease. The clerk without a second glance at him took down a package of quinine and gave it to him.

to be there this time.

"You here again. This isn't goo good. Didn't you take the quinine?"

"Yes, I took it. But I don't understand this fever. I can't work. If you will give me enough money for my boat fare, I'll pay you back as soon as I get well."

The manager sized up this wreck of a man and decided he was a pretty bad risk.

Again he asked, "How much do you owe?"

"I still owe twenty pesos. . . Last Saturday I gave you------Oh, I'm so sick!"

"You know that as long as your account is not paid, that you have to stay here. If you go down the river, you'll probably die. Get well here and straighten out your account."

The superintendent preferred a dead laborer to a distant debtor. It was absolutely impossible to cure that pernicious fever there in the forest where it had been contracted. But he knew that lumberjacks who leave their jobs seldom return.

The only proud boast Pode could make to his boss was that he had never failed to fulfill his contract. It was the strongest plea a lumberjack with debts to be worked off could make.

"It doesn't matter to me whether you have paid off your debts in the past or not. Pay what you owe me now and then

we'll talk about whether you go back to Posadas or not."

This harsh injustice stirred up a sudden and logical desire for revenge. He went to live with Cayé, whose attitude he well knew. They both decided to escape the following Sunday.

That same afternoon he met the superintendent again. The man was in one of his vilest moods. "Last night three escaped. That's what you'd like to do too, huh? They were in debt just like you are. But I'll see that you rot here before you get away. You better watch your step, you and all the rest of you who are listening. Now you fellows know what to expect."

Escape, with all its attendant dangers, was an undertaking which could involve far more serious consequences than a case of pernicious ague. It was certainly one which required a man's complete mental and physical strength.

Sunday arrived. To avoid the vigilance of the overseers, Pode and Cayé for a while pretended to wash clothes and play the guitar. . . . Even after they had been on the trail for half a mile, they were sure that they weren't being followed. Pode was walking with great difficulty.

Ominous warning came when the peculiar resonance of the forest brought an indistinct voice to their ears:

"Aim at their heads! Get both of them!" The overseer and three peons were coming at full speed around a bend

of the trail. The hunt was under way.

Cayé, running, cocked his revolver.

"Surrender, you devils!" shouted the overseer.

"Let's get into the jungle," said Pode. "I haven't enough strength to use my machete."

"Come back, or I'll shoot!" the voice cried again.

"When they come a little closer. . ." Cayé began. A Winchester bullet whined along the trail. "Get in there, Pode," he panted.

Cayé hid himself behind a tree and fired five shots in the general direction of his pursuers. A shrill shout sounded in the air. A bullet chipped off a piece of bark from the tree behind which he was hiding.

"Surrender, or I'll blow off your heads!"

"Get farther in there and hide," Cayé urged. "I'm going to. . ." As soon as he again emptied his gun he followed Pode into the forest. The pursuers, stopped for a moment by the shooting, with renewed vigor and ire fired once more in the probable direction of the fugitives. Some one hundred yards from the trail, and parallel to it, Cayé and Pode were creeping along, doubled almost to the ground to avoid the vines. The pursuers rightly surmised the movements of the fugitives, but since inside a jungle the pursuer runs a far greater risk of being stopped by a bullet than does the pursued, the overseer contented himself with rapid volleys

from the Winchester and loud, defiant yells.

The period of danger had passed. The fugitives sat down overcome with fatigue. Pode wrapped himself up in his poncho and leaned against Cayé. For two hours he suffered a terrific reaction from his recent physical exertion. Then they continued their flight, sticking close to the trail. At nightfall they made their camp. Cayé had brought along a few pancakes. Pode made a fire notwithstanding the thousand and one inconveniences found in a country where, in addition to man, myriads of insects are also attracted to light.

The sun was quite high the next morning when they finally reached the creek--the first and last hope of all fugitives. Cayé wasn't very particular in his selection of the dozen bamboo poles he cut. Pode used his last bit of physical strength in cutting the vines. He had scarcely finished before he was writhing about in another fit of ague.

Cayé made the raft by himself--ten bamboo poles woven together with green vines, with crosspieces at each end. Ten seconds after the raft was finished they were on their way. The little raft, pushed on by the current, drifted into the Paraná.

Nights during this season were very cool. The two men, huddled together, and chilled to the bone, spent long hours drifting downstream. There was no place for their feet but in the water. The Paraná, at flood stage due to the heavy

rains, tossed the small craft about and loosened the knots made of the green vines.

The next day the men ate the last two pancakes which were the only food they had with them. Cayé could scarcely force himself to eat, so the fact that they had so little food didn't bother him much. The bamboo poles, full of holes caused by the borers, were gradually filling with water. By nightfall the little raft barely kept afloat.

Throughout the long inky night, hemmed in by the gloomy walls of the forest, the two men drifted at the mercy of the waves and whirlpools. Their lower limbs were submerged in water. At times the little raft would hover at the edge of a large whirlpool for a moment, only to be caught up again and sent spinning to the next crest. They had difficulty in clinging to the poles which were wet and working loose and which easily slipped from beneath their feet and evaded their feeble grasp.

The water was about to engulf them when they finally touched land. Where were they? They did not know, but they soon discovered that it was a little meadow. They crawled onto the shore and stretched out motionless on their faces. The sun was bright overhead when they awakened. The shore was about twenty meters wide and served as a border strip between river and jungle. A short distance down-stream was the little river Paranai, which they planned to ford as soon as

they were physically able. But their strength was slow in returning: green twigs and grubs are poor food for restoring physical strength. Twenty hours of rain converted the little Paranai into a large river and raised the Parana to flood stage. Even to ford the smaller one was impossible.

Using Cayé's revolver as a support, Pode, in his delirium, stood up and aimed the gun at Caye. "Get the devil away from here," he moaned.

Cayé saw that he could expect anything from his delirious companion. He bent over stealthily to grab a pole with which to unbalance his sick companion.

Pode screamed, "Get into the water there and swim across. You brought me here." His bluish fingers were quivering on the trigger.

Cayé obeyed. He slipped into the current which carried him down the stream a short distance where, behind a curve in the bank, at which point with great effort, he finally crawled to safety. From there, partially recovered, Cayé cautiously spied on his companion. Soon he saw him slip over on his side with his knees pulled up to his face, exposed to the incessant rain. Sometime later, when Cayé had regained a position just opposite the bank on which Pode lay motionless, Caye heard him cry feebly,

"Cayé. . . what the devil. . . how cold it is!"

The autumnal downpour fell upon the dying man all

through the night. Day break found him in his watery tomb.

Cayé, hemmed in by rain, river and jungle, spent seven days on that narrow strip of shore, living on a small supply of roots and grubs. Gradually losing strength, he sank into a stupor from hunger and cold. Day after day he leaned against the bank with his glazed eyes staring fixedly across the flood waters of the Paranai.

The Silex picked him up on the eighth day. His relief was changed into terror, however, when he learned that the boat was going upstream.

"For God's sake, I beg you," he whined to the captain. "Do not put me off at Port X. They will kill me. I beg you not to do it!"

The Silex did not put him off at Port X, and when it soon went back down-stream to Posadas, Cayé was still on board. His mind was still filled with the horrible nightmare of his experiences.

But a short time after landing he was drunk again and had signed a new contract. Again he was stumbling along streets in search of bargains in lotions and perfumes.

THE GAUCHO AND HIS FLEET-FOOTED NAG

Godofredo Daireau

The Argentina pampas are extensive plains which range from the Río Colorado north to the Gran Chaco and from the foothills of the Andes east to the Paraná and the Atlantic coast.

Having exhausted the easy resources of gold, but still liking the New World, the Spanish conquistadores introduced cattle and horses and established their extensive haciendas. In so doing they worked in harmony with natural laws, for the pampas were well-watered by streams flowing to the Parana, the Plata, and the coast.

Thus the Gauchos, a nomadic race of mixed Spanish and Indian descent, came into being. They cared for the vast herds of cattle which the Spanish grandees spread out over treeless, unfenced, and uncontested millions of acres of grassy plains. The conquering and resourceful Spaniards had found in the soil, the cattle and the hard-riding Gauchos a natural and limitless source of wealth. With monies accruing from the lucrative cattle raising, the landowners acquired wealth, education, travel, and prestige.

The Caucho acquired, on the other hand, that which was infinitely more important to him--a way of life that was close to the soil and that offered freedom of movement, excitement, and satisfactions peculiar to nomadic pursuits over endless stretches of the verdant pampas. By night, to the accompaniment of the guitar, he poured out his folk songs

which were the forerunner of Gauchesque literature and the Argentinian short story.

The Gauchos lived their wild and carefree life well into the first decade of the twentieth century, although their decline began about 1860. Fences and other restricting influences of mechanized civilization began to force them into less picturesque methods of earning a livelihood.

They were the most colorful figures in South America before the mechanization of industry took place and forced them from their strongholds. The ranches of the Argentine are as modern and as well-equipped as those in the United States today. The horse has been replaced by the automobile.

Finding himself in conflict with this new order of society, the Gaucho has been given the choice of doing manual labor on the ranches or becoming an industrial worker.

"The Gaucho and His Fleet-footed Nag" has been chosen not because of the social import of the story itself, but because of the fine description it gives of this almost legendary figure at the present time. The word Gaucho now evokes only a nostalgic twinge in the Argentinian heart in much the same way that the word cowboy does in the heart of a North American.

This story, written by Godofredo Daireau, the author of several stories about the Gaucho, was found in the book <u>El Gaucho y La Pampa</u>, edited by L. Clark Keating and Joseph S. Flores.

THE GAUCHO AND HIS FLEET-FOOTED NAG

The crowd at the races was having a wonderful time. Because optimism was running high, every nag became a potential winner. Bets were being placed with abandon. Anything could happen on a day like this. So little time intervened between each race that they had to limit the number of startings in order to clear the track for following ones.

About this time a very old, white-haired gaucho joined the milling mob. His skin was as dry and wrinkled as parchment. His beard was white. He was riding an old nag even skinnier than himself. The horse's trappings were as old and worn as the gaucho's clothes.

No one seemed to know him or pay any attention to him. In this crowd of moderns he epitomized the spirit of times long gone, the spirit of the gaucho of yesteryear.

A young blood, passing by, jestingly flung a remark at him:

"Hi, grandpa! I'll race your fleet-footed nag."

A general outburst of laughter followed. These men, confidently mounted on good horses, were quick to visualize how ridiculous such a race would be.

"Good. Name your distance."

The group laughed even more raucously when they heard the old gaucho's words uttered in such a serious tone.

"One hundred yards. Or, is that too far for Rocinante?"

"It's all right with me. How much will you put on the race?"

"How about fifty cents? If you can find that much."

Without a word the old man took the coins from his pocket.

A hundred yards! People walked or ran that distance. They didn't ride. However, the crowd felt sure that the poor creature wouldn't be able to make even that distance. People were becoming interested now. They couldn't help admiring the spirit and daring of the old codger who, at his age and on such a horse, would venture to run even so short a distance although the stakes were negligible.

The old fellow threw off his poncho, unsaddled his old nag, tied a handkerchief on his forehead, and the race began.

Can you believe this, reader? The fleet-footed nag made off like a streak of lightning. The judges had scarcely settled themselves in their box when the old horse streaked past them. The other horse, at full gallop, gave the impression of going in slow motion.

"What about a two and a half mile race now?" the old fellow asked his adversary when the first race was finished.

"It's a deal. What's more, I'll put a hundred pesos

on it." The young man was definitely miffed.

"It's all right with me," the old man said simply as he took the hundred pesos from a badly-worn pocket and handed them to the lineman. "I'm poor but I have faith in my steed."

The crowd was in an uproar now. It promised to be an interesting race but how about betting? Could the old nag possibly run such a long distance?

"Didn't you see him run a little while ago?" asked one.

"Yes, I know," countered another. "But that was one hundred yards, not two and one-half miles. This is another matter."

A lot of betting was done, and as you can well believe, those who placed their bets on the gaucho and his nag were not the skeptical and the cautious.

Without much expenditure of effort the old horse won once more.

The crowd wasn't reluctant to show its admiration. A few old gauchos scattered throughout the mob proudly exclaimed:

"We haven't lost all the skill and valor of olden times."

The old man wasn't long in spending the hundred pesos he had won! His native eagerness took care of that. Wasn't it only right that he ask his contemporaries to celebrate his

victory with him?

Shortly after this, havoc broke loose in the nearby saloon. Two fellows had drawn knives on each other and they really meant business. When the old gaucho tried to break up the fight, the men forgot their quarrel and turned on him with insults and threats. When he saw that they were coming at him with murder in their eyes, he drew his knife and in less time than it takes to tell it he put an end to that matter. His parting bit of advice was that they really should let their beards grow before they began to think of such things. By that time they would look more like gauchos and act more like them.

Now that he had proved himself to the people, he didn't look quite so weak. They no longer thought of his nag as being old or weak either. As they wandered home that night in the shadows of the Pampa, the people asked each other who he could be. More than one had the feeling that he was not a man of flesh and blood but rather the spirit of some departed gaucho.

It happened the same day a long distance from the scene of the races that our gaucho appeared where some men were trying to _bolear_[1] ostriches. It was the only thing the men

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[1] _bolear_: to bring down game birds or animals by throwing a lariat or rope with a ball or weight at each end known as _boleador_ .

could think of doing at the moment without tiring their horses. The old fellow wasn't much impressed with their skill at <u>bolear</u>, and didn't hesitate to tell them so.

At first, seeing that he was an old man, in fact, a very old man, and that his mount was certainly no younger, they made fun of him. Some of them told him he had better confine his advice to matters of his own household because at his age gaming for ostriches and criticising people who did it was no longer in his province.

He made no comment but when a deer shot up from nowhere and disappeared in the tall grass beyond, he exclaimed:

"Let's see who can get him."

Before the others had time to collect their wits about them, he was running after the deer on his fleet-footed nag whirling his boleadores. He had the animal down before the others reached the scene.

You should have seen the admiration of those men! They affectionately called him "grandpa." They wanted him to stay to teach them more secrets of the Pampa. He did stay a short time but he had to be off, he said, to a ranch where he was breaking horses. They couldn't contain their astonishment when they heard that he was a horsebreaker too.

"Why shouldn't I be?" he parried with a shrug of his shoulders.

The ranch hands, grouped around the corral where the

untamed colts were kept, expressed the same doubt when he asked them if their patrón needed a bronco buster. The patrón laughed a bit at his asking for such a job. He told him he was too old for such work. But the old gaucho's insistence won for him not only the job but also the privilege of choosing the colts he wanted to break.

He lost no time in getting ready for the work. He threw off his poncho, he unsaddled his plug and turned him loose to graze, and he tied a handkerchief around his head. With coiled-up lasso, he entered the corral.

What a strange thing that was or were they seeing things? He was as agile as a young boy. He was as strong and skillful as a youth. What a sense of equilibrium the man had! With one movement he lassoed an untamed colt. As soon as he threw him to the ground, he began to tie up his feet. He worked so fast that the other peons couldn't keep up with what was going on. They were quite useless as far as giving help was concerned. The old man knew all the fine points of his art: how to jump on the wild horse in one leap, how to struggle against the thousand defenses of the beast, how to contend with that first mad, savage gallop of the untamed animal whose eyes were rolling about in a frenzy.

The onlookers applauded enthusiastically. The gaucho of yesteryear had returned to show the young fellows how they once broke colts on the Pampa. The spirit of this old man

evoked proud recollections of the Pampa of the Argentine. They admired the impetuous courage and the confident skill of both the old man and his fleet-footed nag.

These people were eager to acquire and transmit to their children some knowledge of the natural talents which so many generations of the now-vanquished gaucho had possessed. They felt that to preserve a record of gaucho achievement was important. He was symbolic to them of strength, cleverness, perserverance, and generosity.

At night the old gaucho told them stories or recited poems to the accompaniment of the guitar. He made a world which had long since crumbled to dust live once more. It was a world of different customs, dress, and forgotten philosophy which years ago had made up the soul of the gaucho and had become the native soul of the Argentine. It was the exclusive heritage of the Argentinian people.

One morning, no one knows exactly how nor when, the old gaucho and his fleet-footed nag left without warning. The story circulated that, having seen a mountain on the distant horizon, he felt the yen to seek out its mysteries and learn its secrets.

The gauchesque soul, embodied in the visage of the old man and his weary old horse, vanished like a gust of wind. Only the Pampa, despised by those who did not know it, forgotten by those who did, remained to remind people of the

once proud race of men. After holding the destinies of men in its clutches for so long, it had finally lost its compelling power over them. The death knell of the Pampa was tolling.

THE DEVIL'S SLIDE

Baldomero Lillo

In Chile, as in other countries of Spanish America where foreign capital stepped in and undertook the development of natural resources, the native worker, until very recently, suffered as a consequence. He was offered little protection against unsafe working conditions because the foreigner, intent upon making vast profits, did little to insure him against industrial hazards. Compensation for industrial accidents was given slight consideration. Dependents received no protection in the form of unemployment insurance. Conditions of work imposed by those who controlled the sources of production had to be accepted. These adverse conditions were particularly applicable to mining, since it was one of the principal foreign-controlled industries.

The Chilean coal and nitrate mines, the Peruvian and Mexican silver mines, and the Bolivian tin mines were exploited by foreign capitalists. Because these countries did not have the capital with which to develop their own natural resources, foreign capital was encouraged to enter. The vast profits which went into foreign hands rightfully should have been kept in the countries themselves.

Before the organization of labor unions in the present century, under control of resident leaders who demand and guarantee rights, workers either acquiesced to the will of their superiors and accepted sub-standard working conditions and pay, or their families were faced with starvation. The

conditions under which the working classes were forced to live were deplorable. The workers and their families were poorly clothed, inadequately housed, and under-nourished.

These conditions have been ameliorated with the rise of the labor unions. In Chile, today, the worker receives retirement benefits, accident compensation, and the services of socialized medicine. The advance made in Chile in the improvement of working conditions is the most outstanding development in Spanish America today. "The Devil's Slide" indicates that great strides have been made in this field in the last thirty years.

Baldomero Lillo (1867-1923), born in the Chilean mining town of Lota, occupied an administrative post in the University of Chile for a number of years. At the same time he wrote articles and stories for the Editorial Zigzag and El Mercurio. His paramount interest in writing revealed itself to be the improvement in the working conditions of the Chilean miners and working classes. The first Chilean writer to employ social themes, he was heralded by some as a genius, by others as a crude writer of a worthy literary form.

The story, "The Devil's Slide", is taken from the book, Los Cuentistas Chilenos, edited by Raul Silva Castro.

THE DEVIL'S SLIDE

It was a cold winter morning. The foreman on duty, with a huge book of names before him, was watching the miners as they arrived in small groups ready for their day's work. As they took their carbide lamps from their wall hangers, impassively he eyed each one and put a check before his name. Through the slit in the door the elevator filled with its human cargo could be seen to disappear silently and rapidly down the damp shaft.

The foreman beckoned to two of the workmen as they were hurrying past. A look, first of surprise, then of uneasiness, passed over their pale faces. The younger was a red-headed, freckled, heavily-built youth about twenty years of age whom everyone knew by the name of Copperhead. The older was thin and emaciated looking. In their right hands they held their lamps and in their left, a bunch of cords to the end of which were attached buttons and glass beads of different colors and shapes which served to designate the section of the mine in which the pickmen worked.

The clock on the wall was now striking six. From time to time a tired-looking miner, shooting a timid glance at the foreman, would dash through the door, grab his lamp, and make his way in all possible haste to the elevator. The foreman, severe and impassive, would put a cross before the name of

each latecomer.

Finally, turning his attention to the two silent men, he motioned them to come forward.

"You're pickmen in the Alta, aren't you?"

"Yes, we are, sir."

"I'm sorry to tell you this. There's no more work for you. We're cutting down on the number of workers in that vein."

The only sound which cut into the deep silence was the steady ticking of the clock.

Finally the older man spoke up: "Can't we work in some other vein?"

The foreman closed his book emphatically, leaned back in his chair, and answered in a serious tone:

"I don't see how, fellows; we have more than enough workmen already."

"We'll take anything you can give us, anything, senor; we can make lathes or do repair work, or--."

The foreman was unmoved by their supplications. "I have told you we have too many men working here already. If we don't get more orders for coal than we have lately, we'll have to close down some of the veins."

The lips of the older man drew together in a bitter ironic smile. "Be frank, don Pedro, tell us you want to make us work in the Devil's Slide."

The foreman straightened up in his chair and protested indignantly. "No one is compelled to do any sort of work here. However, since you're free to refuse work which you don't like, the company is within its rights in taking measures to protect its interests."

The two men stared into space in silent withdrawal. Objections were futile now. The foreman changed his tone when he saw that their resistance was overcome.

"Although the orders I have here are final, I want to help you out of this difficulty. There is need for two pickmen in the new vein--the Devil's Slide, as you call it. If you want to take the job now, fine. Tomorrow it will be too late."

The two men shot understanding glances at each other. They had heard before of the tactics used and the results they procured. They were trapped. There was no alternative. Between dying of hunger and being crushed in a cave-in, the latter was preferable. At least death would come more quickly. Besides, where could they go were they to refuse?

Winter was anything but a friend to a helpless man out of work and without funds. Desolate and deserted fields, wide swamps of muddy, stagnant water, barren trees standing out against an unfriendly sky gave no encouragement to those without the security of a job. The cold ground of the countryside offered nothing. Were they to beg at factory doors?

They were the defenseless poor who find themselves in perpetual struggle with the adversities of fortune and without recourse to justice. They could but walk through the galleries of the mine knowing that the hand of death might fall upon them as it had upon so many others.

The deal was closed. Once in the cage, without loss of time they were dropped straight down to the depths of the mine.

The tunnel of the Devil's Slide had a bad reputation. At first, the authorities had taken every required precaution in its construction and upkeep. Since this level was at a great depth, the rock was porous and treacherous, and constantly kept chipping away. The roof, held up by wooden support, was in imminent danger of falling in.

An immense quantity of lumber was required for props and, since the purchase of it would decrease profit to a considerable degree, the authorities continued to neglect essential reconstruction. Weak parts were strengthened to be sure, but, for economy's sake, the repair work was not done with necessary thoroughness.

The results were not long in showing up. Quite often a bruised or badly injured victim, and occasionally a dead man, who had met his untimely end with the collapse of the faultily supported ceiling, were carried out. The workers growing terrified at the frequency of these tragedies began

to object to working in this corridor of death. For a time the company overcame this aversion by adding a bit to the daily wages. This policy was soon discontinued without a resultant work stoppage, they found.

Copperhead arrived home later than usual that night, grave and thoughtful. He gave only monosyllabic replies to his mother's questions about his day's work.

His mother, María de los Angeles by name, was a tall, slender woman with prematurely gray hair. Her face wore an habitually sweet but resigned expression. Tears seemed to well within her eyes ready to be released at the slightest provocation. Except for this one son, tragedies of the mine had taken all her dear ones. Their lives had been the tribute which the insatiable avidity of the mine had exacted. Her days were spent in constant anxiety lest the mine should claim him, too, as its own. While she went about her daily tasks, in her imagination she walked with him through the mine's cavernous passages. He was the only bond which united her to the world of the living.

Unlike so many homes of this class of people, there was a certain decency and cleanliness about the place. In those of many miners, men, women, children, and animals lived in repugnant promiscuity suggesting, if one might say so, the Biblical version of Noah's Ark.

While María de los Angeles was putting the finishing

touches on the dinner, Copperhead was seated by the fire lost in thought. Baffled by his unaccustomed silence, she was about to ask him the reason for his preoccupation when the creaking hinges of the door heralded the entrance of a neighbor.

"Oh, good evening. How's your husband getting along?"

"About the same, the doctor says the bone in his leg hasn't healed yet and that he must stay in bed and not move."

She was a young woman. Privation and lack of sleep had left their mark upon her face. In her right hand she carried a tin pan. While she was speaking, she tried to refrain from looking at the steaming soup on the stove. The older woman took the vessel from her and poured the hot liquid into it, asking:

"Have you talked to the bosses, child? Have they offered you any help?"

"Yes, I did talk to them but it didn't help. They told me that I didn't have a right to anything. They told me that in giving us a room rent-free they were doing more than they had to. If he dies, they will give me four candles and a shroud. May God forbid that he put them to that expense!" As an afterthought she added as she went out the door: "The Virgin will repay you for your kindness, neighbor."

"Poor Juana," said María de los Angeles addressing her son who had pushed his chair up to the table. "It is

nearly a month since they found him lying in a crevice with a broken leg. What job did he have?"

"He was a pickman in the Devil's Slide."

"Everyone says that people who work there have their lives held in ransom."

"It's not so bad as that, Mother. It's different now. They have done a lot of repair work, and there haven't been any accidents now for more than a week."

"Well, whatever you say, I couldn't stand for you to work there. I'd prefer to go begging. I don't want them to bring you home dead as they did your father and brothers."

Recalling those moments of tragedy made big tears course down her cheeks. Silent, the boy ate his meal with his eyes fixed on his plate.

Fears of older people generally fall upon the deaf ears of the young, but knowing her attitude, he couldn't tell her that he was working in the Devil's Slide. There would be plenty of time to tell her about it later. Like all the other fellows who worked with him, he was a fatalist, feeling that everyone was put upon this earth for a certain time and whatever one might do to out-maneuver destiny, it would be to no avail.

The next morning after her son's departure María de los Angeles marvelled at the beauty of the day. A haloed sun was just appearing over the horizon casting its glorious rays

upon the earth beneath. The damp earth sent up its blue and white vapor. The light of a star, gentle as a caress, poured the breath of life upon the barren earth. In the distance, flocks of birds crossed the heavens, and a rooster of iridescent plumage crowed from a sandy mound whenever the shadow of a bird in passage fell upon him.

Old men, supported by canes and crutches, attracted by the morning's splendour and eager to drink in its warmth, were walking along slowly, stretching their benumbed limbs. They were the invalids of the mine, a few of the many who had given to it their health and strength. Few were sound of body, having sacrificed at least a leg or an arm to its cause. Not one word did they speak. Occasionally one or another of them would emit a short, cavernous cough and their lips would half-open to spew out spittle as black as ink.

The noon hour was approaching, women were busy preparing lunch baskets for their men when suddenly the alarm rang. Everyone rushed from the houses and in terror made their way down the street.

María de los Angeles was busy putting a bottle of coffee in her son's lunch basket when the alarm sounded. Dropping everything, she rushed toward the door. Groups of frantic women, holding their skirts as they went, fear standing out on their faces, hurried down the street, followed by crowds

of children. María de los Angeles ran with them as if on winged feet. Terror galvanized her old muscles. Her body shook and vibrated like a violin bow at maximum tension. She soon passed the people who had started out before her. She seemed to attract and draw the mass of frightened, ragged humanity.

Houses were deserted. Windows and doors banged. A dog tied in one of the galleries of the mine howled as if in reply to the plaintive, indistinct clamor in the distance.

In much the same way that baby chicks find refuge beneath the ruffled feather of a mother hen seeing the sudden descent of a hawk, these panic-stricken women with disheveled hair pushed each other about beneath the bare arms of the hoist. Babies, wrapped in dirty rags, were tightly clasped to their mothers' half-bare breasts. Weird, inhuman sounds came from their half-open, grief-stricken lips.

A strong wooden parapet protected the opening to the mine shaft on one side, and there part of the huge crowd assembled. On the other side, several sullen, taciturn workers held back the crowded lines of people who were asking one question after another about their relatives. Where had catastrophe struck? How many had been killed? Who were they?

At length a corpulent English engineer with pipe between his teeth appeared at the door of the machinery depart-

ment. With characteristic indifference he ran his eyes over the assembled crowd. His appearance met with violent oaths, and hundreds of voices shouted:

"Assassins! Murderers!"

Women shook clenched fists at him. He, who had been the recipient of this unbridled explosion of hostility, casually blew out a few puffs of smoke and turning his back, disappeared.

Workers had appeared on the scene by this time. The crowd quieted down somewhat after hearing their account of the accident. It didn't compare to former catastrophes, they said. There were only three dead; who, they didn't know. It wasn't necessary for them to add that the tragedy had been in the Devil's Slide. They had been working for two hours to bring out the victims and were expecting from one moment to the next the signal to hoist the bodies to the surface.

Hope revived in many an anguished breast. María de los Angeles, who had been leaning against the parapet for support, relaxed. What she felt was not hope but certainty. She knew he was not among the dead. So rigidly determined was she that her son was among the men saved that she scarcely heard the hysterical sobbing and the cries of anguish about her.

Suddenly the moaning of the women ceased. A bell sounded vibrantly and slowly. It was the signal that the

death-bearing cart was being hoisted up. A shudder ran through the crowd as it followed the oscillations of the cable descending into the pit. The unknown, about which everyone was anxious to find out but afraid to learn, awaited them. Only an occasional mournful sob ran through the crowd. A distant howl from the far-off plains came as an omen of death. The big iron ring which crowned the cage showed above the shaft. The elevator shook a bit and then stopped. Bareheaded men, covered with mud and coal dust, stood around the cart.

The crazed desperation of the multitude made it difficult to remove the corpses. The first one was covered with blankets; only the bare mud-stained feet were showing. The second body was that of an old greyhaired and bearded man. As the last corpse was removed, beneath the creases of cloth in which it was wrapped, a few coppery locks, which caught the reflection of the sun, were revealed.

Several voices screeched forth: "Copperhead!"

When María de los Angeles saw that lifeless face and the blood-soaked head of her son, she made a superhuman effort to throw herself upon his body. But being pressed against the parapet, that was impossible.

She could not speak. Her arms fell to her sides useless. A weakness ran through her body. She stood there transfixed.

People began to leave. Many people turned to look at this woman who had sunk into absolute insensibility, so absorbed was she in her contemplation of the open abyss at her feet.

No one ever quite knew how she climbed over the parapet. It happened so suddenly. Her thin body just for a second wavered in the air and then without a sound disappeared into the abyss.

Some seconds afterwards a dull noise, distant, almost imperceptible, came forth from the hungry mouth of the mine shaft. Thin vapor emanated from it. It was the breath of the monster, gorged on blood, in his lair in the bowels of the earth.

THE MAIL

Abelardo Gamorra

Political corruption in governmental circles of Peru was rampant at the turn of the present century. Powerful political rings were completely in control of all affairs of state. Any attempt on the part of opposing and minority factions for fair dealing was disregarded and squelched. People who were not in political authority or favor were powerless to seek redress of grievances.

Mail carriers were unwillingly recruited into service and given no remuneration in return for services rendered. An undesirable element of society which consisted of social outcasts, criminals, ne'er-do-wells, and young, uneducated Indian youths who had no training or background to fit them for the work to be done, were given these positions of responsibility.

The mail was intercepted by those in power. Communications, regardless of ownership, were destroyed and confiscated as a common practice. The mail itself was poorly protected from the hazards of weather. The horses of these so-called postal employees were unfit to be pressed into such arduous service.

The author of "The Mail" touches upon this grave social problem of the early twentieth century. It is to be understood that this problem is no longer existent today.

Abelardo Gamorra, born in Peru in 1857 in the provinces, is known for his <u>costumbrista</u> writings. A journalist by

profession, by the age of twenty-seven he owned his own newspaper, La Integridad.

"The Mail" is from the book Spanish American Readings, edited by Willis Knapp Jones and Miriam M. Hansen.

THE MAIL

In the midst of claps of thunder and bolts of lightning which seemed to foretell the end of the world, the Indian mail carrier was pursuing his way as best he could. Clinging to his horse's mane in weakness and weaving about in his saddle, he was soaked to the very marrow of his bones. The nag on which he rode looked as if he were about to depart from this earthly scene. On one side of the saddle was a saddlebag full of letters. The old blanket which was to have served as a covering for the mail had fallen back on the horse's haunches, its purpose unaccomplished. Letters and papers alike were soaked through and through. That was not strange, for the rain was pouring down in torrents and the hail was beating down on all sides. On the other side of the saddle he carried his lunch, wrapped in native cloth, and the hundred and one things sent for by the magistrate's family.

In a land high in rubber production and one in which large quantities of rubber goods were manufactured, it seemed strange that the postal department could not supply so much as an old oilcloth to protect the mail from the ravages of weather.

"Hello, señor."

"Good day, friend. Where do you come from?"

"From the coast, sir."

"Are you a worker on one of the haciendas around here?"

"No, I'm the mail carrier, sir."

"Oh, I see! The mailman, you say?"

"That's all, sir."

"How much do they pay you?"

"They don't. They just draft you. The governor just grabs you and sends you to get the mail, threatening you with jail if you refuse."

"Your horse can't go much farther, can he?"

"I guess I'll have to leave him on the hill."

"Don't you want a little drink to warm you up?"

"I was hoping you'd give me one, sir."

After this the traveler pursued his lonely way, glancing back to see the Indian lad digging the spurs into his old plug and kicking him in vain, for not one inch would he move. The poor old horse with head down, tongue hanging out, and ears drooping, finally fell over, never to rise again.

The mail carrier loosened the cinch, took of the skimpy saddle which lacked a sweat pad, and threw it over his shoulders, together with the saddlebag of letters and parcels. Then rolling up the legs of his trousers he continued on his way amidst the shadows of the afternoon and the unrelenting fury of the storm.

He huddled in a cave at the foot of a cliff, chewed a bit of coca[1] and, his head pillowed on the saddlebag, went to sleep.

The next day he continued his journey, leaving the saddle and bridle at the nearest hut with the promise of picking them up on his return trip. At nightfall he arrived at the village, bathed in sweat and half-starved.

His intimate friend, the saddle-maker, immediately invited him to partake of some hard cider. Meanwhile a farmer, with the mail carrier's permission, went through the mail bag as if it were his personal property.

The center of government in this village was the general store, and as usual it was full of loafers. The magistrate's wife was in charge of selling hard cider. The magistrate, himself, with little red, seedy eyes, had his poncho thrown over his shoulders and his hat hanging at the nape of his neck. With puffed-out chest he was strumming his guitar.

A young lad entered and said: "I have been sent to ask if the mail has arrived yet."

The administrator's wife replied, "Nothing has arrived yet, child."

"Why do you answer him?" said the administrator. "Don't you know that he is our enemy?"

"Careful, careful now!" one of the gay crowd cautioned.

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[1]coca: source of cocaine widely used by Andean Indians.

"Read this letter, hombre, and you'll see what I mean."

Capital

January 1, 1898

Señor don Fulano Chascamorroso
Chungalmajada

Dear Sir:

Doctor X is definitely interested in the reason for your not being promoted. I have been instructed to tell you not to worry. What you must do is to help the doctor and do the right thing by him in the election.

Sincerely yours,

Cunaza N.

"Now see? Today that fine fellow who sent the boy here will receive neither his letters nor his newspapers. Let him go to the devil."

At this point in the conversation the mail carrier appeared.

"Well, you half-breed servant," said the magistrate brusquely, "I'll bet you've forgotten everything my daughter asked you to bring back."

"Everything is here, sir."

"Well, let's see."

All the women made a dash for the saddlebag and began untying the package which contained the things they had sent for. The untied the big bundle of letters, and the parcels

were tossed about in every direction for the bystanders to pick up.

"Let's see the news," said one, tearing off the wrapping of a newspaper.

"I'll bet this letter is from don Fulano," interposed another.

"Give it to me, give it to me," the magistrate commanded. "And you may as well toss that parcel post package over here, too."

While the assembled company was closely examining the mail, one, then two, then four boys tucked their heads in the doorway to ask, "Has the mail arrived?"

"It isn't mail time yet," the magistrate replied roughly. "He hasn't come yet."

Yet everyone knew that the mail had come.

In the meantime the magistrate's wife called to one of the children to distribute the mail, having selected the letters of the Deputy Prefect, who held her husband's destiny under his thumb, and those of her friends.

She looked through the bunch of newspapers and kept those she herself liked to read. The rest of the mail remained subject to the rural censorship of the magistrate and his jovial friends, whose office it was to open letters and destroy newspapers.

In the dim light of a tallow candle they confiscated

everything that showed them up to a disadvantage, treating it as if it were their own.

The mail carrier, having accomplished his mission, shook out his saddlebag which had been turned inside out, threw his wet poncho over his shoulder and left for his home, some two miles beyond the village.

The next day the office of the magistrate was not open for business inasmuch as the wild party was still far from being over. People who were not protegees of the influential penpusher paced outside the miserable store like souls in purgatory.

"What goes on here?" asked an outsider who was a witness to irregularities of this sort. "Aren't there good men in this village?"

"Yes, there are, but public administration is in the hands of a powerful political ring against which the anguished wail of the nation is heard to no avail."

Don Fulano is recommended by don Zutano for political office. During the lifetime of the said don Zutano, or as long as his political party remains in power, don Fulano is a governmental fixture and there is no human power strong enough to wrest him from office.

During the afternoon of the second day, when the magistrate felt the full force of his hangover, and his pals and he were finishing off a kettle of potatoes and one of

hard boiled eggs, his wife opened the door, ready to do her duty at distributing the mail. People came pouring in and conversation such as this was heard:

"Any papers for don A?"

"None."

"Are there any letters for don B?"

"No, there aren't."

"Parcel post packages for don C?"

"They didn't come."

"It's impossible that my newspapers didn't come."

"Well, if you don't believe me, look in my packet."

"But I subscribed for it six months ago!"

"This letter you gave me has been opened!"

"Probably the rain opened it."

"What about this torn envelope on the floor with my name on it?"

"Just try to put me in jail!"

"Where's your husband, the magistrate?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know."

Conversation was disrupted by the arrival of the deputy prefect. The crowd left because they detested the very sight of him. He wore the dress of a soldier except for his straw hat and his wide belt with pockets.

The magistrate's wife immediately poured him a generous drink. While he kept on drinking, people with outgoing

mail began to come in. It was made ready to be sent out. Now the question was: What were they going to do about finding a mailman?

"Get one from the jail," blustered the deputy prefect. "That half-breed from the uplands we threw in the other day ought to be all right."

The prisoner was brought on the scene.

"You're going to carry the mail."

"If it's your will, sir."

"Do you know the road?"

"I'll ask, sir."

"Okeh, but remember this--you're to be back by next Sunday."

"Of course, sir."

"Well, be on your way."

"Goodbye, sir."

The half-breed picked up the mailbag, delighted at the opportunity to go home for a two-day rest before starting out on the trek which we described in the fore part of the story.

Occasionally, in the midst of these involved events, the government inspector would arrive. Generally speaking, that would mean bringing out another glass of liquor and preparing barbecued chicken. Did not the deputy prefect have to show his hospitality to this old acquaintance of his from

Lima? This would lead to the inspector's drawing up a report with a request for an increase in salary for the magistrate, accompanied by an affadavit signed by all his patrons and even by those who had received the worst treatment at his hands. Putting down a mark for a signature made it a simple procedure.

Thus, the cycle would start over again and everyone would go on his merry way.

SAVIORS OF THE NATIVE LAND

Rufino Blanco-Fombona

The revolutionary ideas of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" spread to the New World from France in the early nineteenth century, inspiring the peoples of Spanish America to rise up against the mother country to seek liberation from her.

Spanish colonial policy was based on the premise that to educate the peon and to make of him an independent, confident being would be to lose hold over him. Declarations of independence per se in individual countries did not give the laboring classes the promised rights and privileges. In theory, yes; in actuality, no.

The Indian is still an oppressed being, and the Indian question still looms on the horizon of Spanish America as one of the greatest and the most difficult of solution today. Uprisings, revolts, and bloodshed have been the result of the repression of this element of society.

Rufino Blanco-Fombona in his "Saviors of the Native Land" points out the grave error of badly organized rebellion which at best offers but temporary solutions to problems at hand. The hot-blooded Latin temperament, epitomized in the soldier who mockingly calls to the dying youth to rise up to go to his country's defense, is easily aroused to violence. The value of the individual life is negligible in the hands of a crazed, angry mob often ignorant of the cause for which

it is fighting.

Great numbers of illiterate peons surrender their lives to ambiguous causes, spurred on by soap-box oratory and the eloquent but empty promises of self-appointed, emotional leaders. The utter futility of poorly-armed masses' pitting themselves against superior, well-trained forces does not occur to the individual in the heat of the moment.

Poorly clad, hungry, oftentimes to the point of starvation, in some instances the peons sacrifice their lives to the patria which has kept them in slavery, ignorance, and poverty.

The mob psychology of unorganized or disorganized masses is forcibly portrayed in the following story in which one finds scenes typical of any revolt, be the scene laid in Venezuela, Mexico, or Cuba.

Rufino Blanco-Fombona (1876-) a Venezuelan, is regarded as one of the most outstanding literary personalities of Spanish America. He writes in many mediums of expression: the short story, the novel, and poetry. Many of his writings carry sociological significance. He rates high as a literary critic.

"Saviors of the Native Land" is from the book, Spanish American Readings, edited by Willis Knapp Jones and Miriam M. Hansen.

SAVIORS OF THE NATIVE LAND

Crispín Luz, his wife, María, and Juanita, who was both servant and friend of the family, had gone to spend a few weeks at the hacienda at Cantaura which the Luz family owned. Crispín, who had been stricken with pulmonary tuberculosis, to make a complete recovery, needed the curative properties of the mountain air.

Joaquín, his older brother, was the manager of the rural estate. He gave lodging to Crispín and his family in what they called the "old house" some three or four hundred meters distant from the new one in which he lived with his family.

Every morning upon rising, Joaquín would go over to greet his sick brother. One morning he appeared earlier than usual. He was on horseback. The fact that he was excited showed up when he shouted:

"María! Crispín!"

"What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"It's necessary for you to make preparations to leave immediately."

"Leave? But why?"

"War has just broken out. General Hache started a rebellion last night at Quarico."

"Why must we leave?" asked Crispín, amazed at his

brother's urgent tone. "Why? Everything is quiet here and will be for sometime."

"Heavens above, Crispín. You don't know what you're saying. Listen," he said, continuing in a whisper, "I have just received this communication and definite orders from the revolutionary committee of Caracas. Tomorrow at daybreak, I am to head a rebellion here."

"You? In Cantaura? Are you crazy? What about your wife and children?"

Crispín was looking at the ripe, red coffee berries on the swaying bushes about ready for harvest. He couldn't understand this absurd abandonment of the farm. Thoroughly alarmed, he rebuked his brother.

"It's a crime, Joaquín. The crop, the farm, everything will be ruined. It's a crime, that's what it is. Just now when we could get out of debt by selling the coffee and being a bit economical, we must bring ruin upon ourselves instead. It's crazy, senseless."

"What about your family?" María asked in alarm.

"They are leaving today for Caracas. You must make your preparations to leave too."

Lowering his voice to a whisper, he added:

"My orders were to start this rebellion this forenoon. However, it will be impossible to get the people together before tonight or maybe even tomorrow at daybreak. My advice

to you is to take the afternoon train."

Heading his horse in the opposite direction, he disappeared from sight among the coffee trees.

María began to pack with all possible haste, all the while imagining that she saw guns pointed at her on all sides and swords ready to cut her throat. Juanita screamed. Críspin became furious. What a shame that this should happen, just when they were all getting along so well at Centaura. What a pity! This damnable revolution! No one had so much as breathed a word about it before this.

Before Joaquín left, he gave them the proclamation of the revolutionary chief which had been published in Caracas and which was now being circulated throughout the country. It was a printed proclamation, high-sounding as most subversive documents are, in which avowels were made to demolish tyranny. It went on to say that the state must be saved and happiness spread through the medium of the purifying bayonet. In the polished eloquence of political language it said that the Venezuelans were invited to undertake this tremendous task of redemption, regardless of which political faction they might belong to, or to what political beliefs they might adhere. The rebels called themselves Saviors. Grotesquely, the revolution was being called the Revolution of the Saviors!

It was impossible for the families to make their

departure before the following day, despite Joaquin's insistence that they leave immediately.

The "saviors" began arriving and congregating that night shortly after darkness. They were peons of the surrounding countryside, incapable of even reading the proclamation which had so inspired them to give their all to this obscure cause. The poor devils were destined to be the cannon fodder of this revolution, future victims of this high-sounding cause.

Like stage conspirators they arrived one by one or in small groups, creeping stealthily along, their firearms hidden beneath their blankets, shortly after the sun had set. They hid in corridors, in the neighborhood of the house, and in the patios of a building known as "La Trilla," (The Husk), called that because there a machine for husking coffee had been installed. The most cautious of them went to sleep, hidden among the trees.

Before daybreak came, the three hundred mountaineers were quartering several yoke of oxen and roasting the meat over the live coals of a fire.

The most foresighted were storing away in their knapsacks and even in their duffle bags of white linen, which were already a dirty brown, their share of the meat which they hadn't eaten.

Most of them were dressed in trousers, blouses, and

sandals. They wore wide-brimmed straw hats on their heads. Some wore shirts, others, jackets. Each one wore a broad belt and in a sheath carried a hunting knife, varying a great deal in length. A few carried daggers and revolvers. The most provident carried twisted mesh bags over their shoulders to the end of which were hung gourds for brandy or coffee, depending on the temperance and preference of the individual. Others had attached twine to their shoulder belts and to the twine had fastened hollow bulls' horns. They were to serve as glasses.

Some of the men, long accustomed to gunfire, made fun of the raw recruits, gave them advice, and told them stories of military exploits. They wore old sabres on old, showy leather sword belts. Their colorful shoulder belts were made of wool or grass. Their swords were curious museum pieces of different sizes, types, and origins. There were sharp-pointed ones as narrow as spurs. There were broad-bladed, ponderous ones full of majesty and worthy of comparison with Durandal.[1] What every last one of them carried was a blanket and cane knife, indispensable and inseparable accessories of the Venezuelan peasant.

Joaquín Luz, followed by eight or ten horsemen, finally appeared on horseback. One could tell by a glance at

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[1]Durandal: Roland's sword.

their rifles and swords that they were in command.

Joaquín without a question was a fine specimen of manhood. He had wide shoulders. He held his head erectly and had an easy air about him. Everyone was impressed by his manly appearance. His jovial conversation, his frank smile, and even his black beard, which was always carefully trimmed, gained him goodwill among the peons. Without a doubt, that man, so superior in appearance and confidence, had to be the commandant.

He rode a spirited chesnut horse. He had a blue and red blanket, similar to those worn by the poorest peons, draped about him to stirrup length.

The two families were in the old house of the hacienda tying up the last packages and on the point of departure. Joaquín approached the group in the corridor without getting off his horse. He leaned over in the saddle and whispered something in his wife's ear. It made her cry like a baby. He kissed his children as John, the cook's son, raised them to their father's lips. He embraced Crispín and said goodbye to all the others gathered there. Then he suddenly heeled towards the patio after the last farewell and in a spirit of comraderie spoke to his volunteers.

"Boys, I suppose that everyone is happy to go on this mission. Is anyone here going against his will? If there is anyone here who does not want to go, let him speak up. There's

still time."

The people nearest the impromptu leader spoke up. "We all want to go."

Someone even shouted: "Long live our chieftain."

That was followed by several vivas.

Joaquín's wife wept bitterly. Moved by the prestige of their father, the older children wept bitterly.

Spurred on by the vivas and the vote of confidence which the group had given him, he stood up in his stirrups and made an eloquent, patriotic speech.

"OK, comrades, let us go to war. Our cause demands it; our native land requires it. Let us abandon our homes, let us sacrifice our lives to overthrow tyranny and impose legality and justice. The enemy has the arms. Let's take them away from them. Long live the revolution!"

Only one sonorous, enthused, ardent cry was heard in response. "Vivaaaaa!"

The leader, followed by peons and horsemen, spurred on his horse and was soon lost among the trees.

His wife, clinging to their oldest son, continued to say: "Poor Joaquín!"

"Don't say that; he is happy!" Crispín said emphatically. "Don't you see how the crowd follows him wherever he bids them go. To death or to victory, it matters not to them. He looks like a feudal lord!"

A little less than two hours after Joaquín had departed, the noise of horses' feet was heard.

One of the boys, who came out to the patio, said innocently:

"It must be Papá who is returning."

That was not true, however. It was the governmental forces stationed in the nearby town of Los Teque who had just learned of the uprising at Cantaura. They were coming to put down the insurrection.

"Run, John, or they'll catch you," the old cook shouted to her son who was the only male, apart from Crispín, who had stayed there to transport the family and care for the hacienda. He ran, but not rapidly enough to escape notice.

"There goes a stray," one of the lieutenants shouted.

"Halt, friend," they commanded. Since the fugitive didn't stop, shots rang out poum, poum, poum!

Fortunately John ran like a deer and succeeded in hiding in the garden plot. Soldiers went in his pursuit.

The commandant in charge, in the meantime, quieted the family who were, by this time, frantic. He told them there was no cause for alarm; he was no executioner. He recommended a journey to Caracas as soon as possible. Evildoers increase in time of war, he said.

The cook, wishing to gain the goodwill of the official,

gave him a cup of coffee. The official drank it, sip by sip. One could tell that he was conscious, in the extreme, of his own importance. The soldiers were prying around, poking their noses everywhere. One of the little girls clung to Maria's skirts. Juanita Pérez sent up a series of prayers to Santa Rita, intercessor for impossibilities, for a prompt rescue from that danger. Crispín cursed war. Joaquín's wife pretended to be calm. Children cried. The soldiers had set a straw stack, which adjoined La Trilla, on fire.

After a time some of the soldiers returned, dragging an almost lifeless body. It was John. His body had been riddled with bullets. His poor mother, upon seeing her son bleeding and unconscious, broke into cries of grief.

"That's nothing old woman," one of the soldiers said.

Having lost all fear, angrily, desperately, defiantly shaking her fists, the old lady screamed out:

"Assassins!"

Another soldier, addressing the dying boy as if he were in a mood for jokes, said with a vicious, idiotic smile:

"Hey, lad, buck up so that you can serve your native land."

The old woman, upon hearing that, was again unable to contain her emotions. "Native land! May the good Lord curse it!" The military, always very proper, insisted upon consoling her a bit too effusively.

Crispín, wrathfully waving his feeble arms about, addressed the military. Fatigued by the effort, he fell into an easy chair perspiring and pale.

The soldiers left, each carrying off hens, trousers, cushions, kitchen utensils, and whatever else they could put their hands on. In passing, they shook the coffee trees brutally. The ripe, red berries fell to the ground in useless piles, losing themselves like round, glowing coral.

HOPE IS GREEN

Jorge Ferretis

Industrial enterprise in Mexico was monopolized first by the church and landed estates and then by foreign-controlled companies. The oppressive conditions under which the workers lived for many years were completely ignored by the people in control and by the government. Before the Constitution of 1917 was drawn up, any attempt on their part to demand rights was looked upon as an act of treason and rebellion against a system whose practices were considered inviolate.

Although a body of rights for the legal protection of working men was written into the Constitution of 1917, the problem of their building effective labor organizations to guarantee and insure these legal rights and privileges is still existent. Wages and working conditions have been improved, and vocational education extended to large numbers, but nevertheless the worker is still underpaid and underprivileged. In 1936 an average daily wage of the industrial worker was less than two pesos (fifty cents--American money). Wages have been raised since that date, but costs of living have also risen and the peso has become further devaluated. Workers still live under squalid conditions; infant mortality rates are high, and the problem of health is a grave one.

The right to strike has been abused and misused to the workers' disadvantage; abused because they strike too often, and misused because they strike for inconsequential

causes. Work stoppages which occur at times of strikes necessarily bring privation and near-starvation for the families concerned.

The social problems concommitant with the industrial life of the country have been even further complicated by the rural dwellers' going to the centers of industry and their being unable to adjust to and cope with city life. While great progress has been made within the last two decades to assure the worker more security, much still remains to be done in this respect.

Jorge Ferretis, (1902-) born in the state of San Luis Potosí, Mexico, is one of Mexico's most prolific writers of the short story. He writes with great sincerity and feeling about his country's social problems. The fact that the Mexican Revolution coincided with the formative years of his life no doubt has contributed greatly to his interest in and perception of present day social issues. He writes with keen insight and understanding of his characters and the problems which they encounter.

In "Hope is Green" the problem created by the simple rural dwellers' being drawn to the city, with the appearance of factories and industries, is forcefully brought out.

The story, "Hope is Green," was found in the book, Una Moneda de Oro, edited by Ruth Stanton and Louise Lodge.

HOPE IS GREEN

"Don't go away, son," pleaded the mother. "Why, in those noisy cities--"

"Noisy!" Maco interrupted, getting up in disgust from the stone on which he was seated.

His old mother, standing near the wall of the dilapidated hut, felt uncomfortable. She imagined that thoughts like these were probably passing through his mind:

"That old woman! Talking about a noisy city just as if it were our old cart."

She saw the mocking smile on his lips and her face reddened in embarrassment.

Some days before when she had let herself become enthused about the boy's dreams, her husband had scolded and scoffed. After that first outburst, he had said nothing. Two fears had resolved themselves in her mind: that of seeing her son leave and that of having to stay there alone with her husband who was always so silent.

For her husband's sake as well as her own she was now redoubling her efforts in trying to dissuade the stubborn youth from going to the city.

The withered old man heard the conversation from the bench on which he was huddled. So silent and motionless was he that he might easily have been mistaken for a log. He

felt chilled to the very marrow of his bones. In his mind he knew what his son was thinking!

"Everything here is so old: the horse, the plow, the cart. See the old man huddled on the bench. He scarcely has breath enough left to speak."

The words were as real to the old man as if the son had actually said them to him. He felt like getting up and shouting. Would that he could shout as he once had when Maco was nine years old! He had listened to him with respect then. He had obeyed him without muttering in those days. In the time it took him to get his rheumatic bones off the bench, his anger had subsided. But now that he had stood up, he had to speak. He moved his hands as if to begin but no words came. Still gesticulating, he took a few steps forward and then disappeared around the corner of the hut. This was not the first time that his feet had carried him away from a difficult situation.

They had lived very comfortably on their twenty-five acres of land. They hired a peon to help them with the work.

Their son had never seemed to belong to them. He seemed to have been born with the wanderlust in his blood. Throughout his childhood, they had sensed this. They had often spoken to him of the dangers of city life. Many good men, they had said, become bad ones once they are in the city. They become puppets when they feel the gnawing pains

of hunger, or they grow sick and die.

Yes, he knew about these dangers but he was unafraid of them. The city could not break him. He had been born to become rich. Didn't he know how to read and write? Wasn't he learning to speak like a fine gentleman? He was physically strong, and in his heart he knew he would some day be great.

They had a household saying which they used when times and crops were good and they all felt with certainty that they were about to become rich. It came to the old man's lips now:

"M! Hope is green."

The son's mind was made up; he would go. When the old man realized that the boy was resolute in his determination to leave, he decided he must take a more tolerant attitude. He now assured himself that it was only natural for a young man to venture forth to take advantage of the opportunities awaiting him in the big city.

"There's nothing we can do about it. We're not worth anything any more," the old man said, "but he does have a future."

"That's exactly what I told you," the mother added. "You wanted to frighten him so that we wouldn't be left alone here."

He was on the offensive now. "You're absolutely

wrong; you are the one who's afraid. Let him go, woman, let him go whenever he wants to."

The old woman lifted her eyebrows and then bowed her head. So now he blamed her! She knew this man with whom she had lived so long. He must always be right. She must never let him think otherwise.

The father sold seven sacks of corn. The mother found some money tied in a handkerchief hidden away among the cobwebs of the house. As if in an effort to convince herself, she repeated these words as she untied the handkerchief:

"It isn't true that cities make men wicked."

After the son's departure, one day a neighbor stopped by to chat.

"You're pretty sad, aren't you, doña Remigia?"

"Sad you say, Chencha? Of course not!"

"Someone told me that Maco has left you."

"Well, that's true, but the fact that he has makes us very happy. It's like my old man says. Young people with possibilities don't stay here. It's only people like us who can't do much more than scratch around in the dirt who can stand the boredom."

"Ah."

In their adobe hut the atmosphere had changed completely. They were not going to frighten their son's good luck away by being sad old fogies. They had to be proud and

enthusiastic.

Maco arrived in the city without a care in the world. His parents could pay another peon to till the fields. He hadn't been born to be a peon. He knew how to read and write! He had strength and ambition. Was there any reason for his not becoming a success?

Before his money ran out, he had found work. Luck was with him to have secured a job so easily when there were so many without work. He was earning three pesos a day. Why, he was earning more in a day than most people on a ranch earned in a week!

With his black fur cap on his head and his blue jacket flung over his arm, smelling of oil and sweat, he was on the road to success. He had secured employment in a foundry. Remigia's son carried omnipotence in his fingertips!

He got along well with his companions. He noticed that the girls liked his rustic smile. Even one of the blondes in the office who had eyes of a movie star deigned to notice him.

Twenty-one dollars a week! That was more than thousands of peons could save up in a year. What more could he ask of life?

Every morning he could see a woman selling tobacco and refreshments through an open door across the way. Her daughter let Maco hug her a bit after his day's work. She

was a blonde, and there were more than a hundred workingmen who had their eyes on her. Maco had been her choice. Didn't she let him kiss her? Whenever he left her, he felt as if his heart would burst open with joy. However far he walked, the jubilant feeling within did not leave him. That inner happiness was reflected in his face.

He finally married her. He thought of his mother and felt that if she were to know his bride, she would say:

"That wife of Maco's is prettier than any rich man's wife."

The morning after the wedding when he left for the factory, he felt strong enough to work the levers that move the universe.

Gradually the idea took shape in his mind of asking his parents to come so that they might see him master of the world. Instinctively he knew that his success was the most important thing in the world to them. How his old mother's eyes would shine when she saw him in his new yellow shoes and blue jacket walking with his genteel bride in her new patent leather shoes! Why, with that new suit which he had just bought her, dazzling in its fineness, she could easily pass for the wife of a millionaire!

Money? He had more than enough. There was a Syrian whose business it was to lend money on salaries. When he saw Maco's honest face, without any hesitation he had lent

him one hundred pesos. With the big stipend he was earning, Maco knew he could pay him back in no time.

In the village the old couple were weighing the pros and cons of their son's proposal. From the surrounding hillsides relatives and acquaintances came down to hear the letters read. Remigia kept them in her bosom. They had to see the picture of the elegant-looking daughter-in-law too. Maco wrote that he couldn't understand his great fortune in securing such a cute wife.

Some of the young lads thereabouts after hearing about Maco's success got the idea of leaving the village. They didn't want to be peons either. They would like to feel squeaky shoes on their feet too. They would like blonde wives, to say nothing of earning such handsome wages.

Months passed. To the old couple, the idea of leaving their home seemed almost the same as dying. In their bones there was this superstitious fear of not feeling their native sod beneath their feet. They felt that they might offend the land by their absence.

They knew that they should not leave, but nonetheless they sold their chickens and cows. Since their son called them, (he, to them, was the most precious gift God had given them) the two old people, against their better judgment, left. Long ago during lean years, had they not found bread for their hungry child not noticing the hunger which they them-

selves felt? They had been content with the knowledge that their child was not suffering.

One Sunday, with bundles piled high on their rheumatic shoulders, the old people departed for the city. They were frightened to death now that their backs were turned upon the land, frightened that it would scream out at them:

"You unhappy mortals! You have deserted me. You don't even deserve burial in my bosom, un-hap-py mor-tals."

Closing their eyes to this fear, they left hurriedly.

In the city, their son was no longer king. Belatedly, he had learned arithmetic and the tricks of usurers. His young wife no longer had patent leather shoes. Her hair was disheveled. The baby in her arms was crying of hunger. With a sigh the old man thought of the black cow he had just sold.

In the single room in which they lived, the two old people found it necessary to play at the game of being happy. They masked their true feelings, knowing that it was very important to convince their son that this life was certainly superior to that on the ranch.

Then the strike came. Maco was a born leader. With clenched fists and sonorous voice, he moved into the dangerous field of oratory. Didn't he have a hungry child? He had rights--he had--he had--! The obsession to have!

Black weeks followed. The expression on the faces of

the strikers changed. Finally the five thousand workers, in the excitement of triumph, returned to their labors.

Remigia had begun to sell refreshments with her daughter-in-law's mother while there had been no daily wages coming in. The old man took care of the child, who by this time was creeping about. There was nothing else for the old man to do.

One year passed, then another. Maco earned more, but his needs were also greater. His expression had changed; it was the only visible evidence of his anxiety of mind. It struck Remigia like a thorn in the flesh.

The old man said to her: "Even you are becoming skinny. Don't you feel that the air around here is sickening?"

Remigia said nothing. The old man, after a pause, continued: "I have tried so hard to believe that the air here is good, but it isn't like the air on the ranch."

He sighed, and went out to look for the child since he didn't wish to say more. Remigia, too, felt that the sky was laden with smoke and noise and evil omens.

Why did the two old people stay alive so long? They didn't even talk of returning to the ranch. Without them, maintenance of the household would be a simpler affair and moving would be an easier matter. Maco had had to refuse a good job in a northern foundry because the cost of transport-

ing the family would have taken two months' wages.

The daughter-in-law told her mother that Remigia was now coming to the realization that their ranch land was of no value to them. If they were to sell it, she said, they would get out of debt a little. However, selling their land had not occurred either to Remigia or her husband.

Once again there was talk of strikes.

Allegations. Commissions of workingmen with long lists of demands. Futile pacing up and down the streets. Speakers who were aroused to the point of rashness. Police who came to restore and preserve order.

And suddenly--

It was as if a typhoon had swept the land.

That dark day of Maco's funeral the old folks, stunned by grief, howled like mountain animals. Only that one day. After that they were silent.

A month later they were still rubbing their eyes with the back of their hands but they said not a word.

They felt that the end of the world had come. In the face of this tragedy all they had left was the confidence which they had in each other.

When the shock of Maco's death was over and the sharp edge of grief, worn down, they felt more alone but closer together than ever before. Since Maco's death, everything seemed to be sinking, sinking. From the top of the hill,

the chimneys of the factory seemed to look down upon them in disdain.

They didn't want to rob their daughter-in-law of food. Why should they, since life was all but over for them? But since grief doesn't kill (at least, it wasn't killing them very quickly), Remigia for the time being kept earning a few cents selling refreshments. She heard talk of their taking up a collection for the daughter-in-law. Neither her husband nor she understood about things like that, nor about indemnification, nor policies, nor allegations.

Each day they saw less of the daughter-in-law. They were left in almost complete charge of the little grandson. It was because of him that it did not occur to them to return to their ranch.

The daughter-in-law talked of going to work at a factory. She took off her widow's weeds and replaced them with more glamorous clothes. They surmised that it was for their benefit that she looked sad when she came to visit them. Remigia noticed that she felt uncomfortable in their presence. Perhaps they revived memories which she wanted to forget of her poor dead husband. Her visits became less and less frequent as time went on.

Once they realized that they weren't going to die, the old people mulled over the idea of escaping with their grandson. They took stock of the things they might sell at their

soft drink stand: a few bottles, a counter, a table, and some chairs. They auctioned them off one morning.

Silent and wan-looking, leading their grandson by the hand, they returned home.

They found their adobe house in ruin. Their land was covered with rubbish. Many eyes pitied them. They sold a piece of land so that they might have money to buy food and to pay two neighbors to help them remove the rubbish. A neighbor lent them a cow, someone else gave them a hen. Within two days, these two human shadows began to think that life was again worth living. Was that strange when they saw their little five-year-old grandson playing about on their own land?

"Look, Remigia, I believe that this country air is reviving me. Don't you think I'm looking better?"

"Of course you are."

"Look for my hoe. I am going to show Pedrito how to sow seeds."

As the year progressed, life became increasingly pleasant. The grandfather and the little boy were great friends. Corn now grew in the cleared fields.

Looking at the cornfields, the old man talked to himself.

"Look, Maco. Here is hope. There is no doubt about it. It is green. In a short time it matures. Then it is

not a hope but a reality. There is money in your hand to prove it. Sometimes there are bad years, but not so many of them."

Pedrito, however curious he might be, did not understand what the old man kept saying as he knelt down to pull out weeds.

"Look, Maco, this is the place to live."

Pedrito went in search of Remigia and questioned her in regard to what he had heard.

"Listen, Grandma, I'm sure I don't understand what's happening to Grandpa. All day long he keeps talking to a Maco. Do you know who he can be?"

Remigia remained silent as the little boy's eyes looked into hers for a reply. She wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her blouse and turning away from the child, mumbled inaudibly. He couldn't understand if she were trying to answer him or if she, too, were beginning to acquire the strange habit of talking to herself.

"We called him that when he was a little boy. Maco. Poor little Maco. My old man is walking about now teaching him that hope has to be green. Our poor son didn't like to think that it was that color."

Realizing that she, too, had been talking to herself, she left Pedrito with his question still unanswered. She made her way toward the cornpatch. She called to her husband

to come to sit down beside her.

"I'm not a bit tired, Remigia," he said.

"Fine, I'm glad to hear that but look, we're getting very old---"

"Mm."

"We're getting in the habit of talking to ourselves and we must quit it."

"Quit it? Why?"

"Well, if Pedrito hears us talking to ourselves, he's going to believe that we're pretty worthless. You are still very active; you're not so old that you have to go around talking to yourself."

"OK, fine, but come a little closer."

Seated close together, the two lean old people savored the pleasure of the moment.

"We are very old," he said, "but we are going to sell a lot of calves and make a lot of money. When Pedrito grows up, we'll see that he doesn't fall for some faded skirt. We will look for a pretty girl who will wear better than his mother did."

After a silence he added: "Are you looking, Remigia? Are you looking at the cornfield?"

"Yes, I am. And who knows! Perhaps Maco, himself, is looking at it too."

"It's hard to say. It may be that he is sitting right

behind us watching hope, so beautiful in its greenness, mature."

The old man, to whom the fact that he had lapsed into his old habit was unimportant, got up talking to himself once more.

Remigia remained seated. She watched him as he disappeared into the thickness of the cornpatch. In spite of his thin legs, he walked with such sureness. It was as if his dead son were leading him by the arm. Who, but his dead son, would have such patience with him? And as he helped him along, the old man promised him:

"You will see, Maco. We are going to give you money to buy your Pedrito many calves and carts and everything so that he will never want to leave this land. You'll see, Maco, you'll see."

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